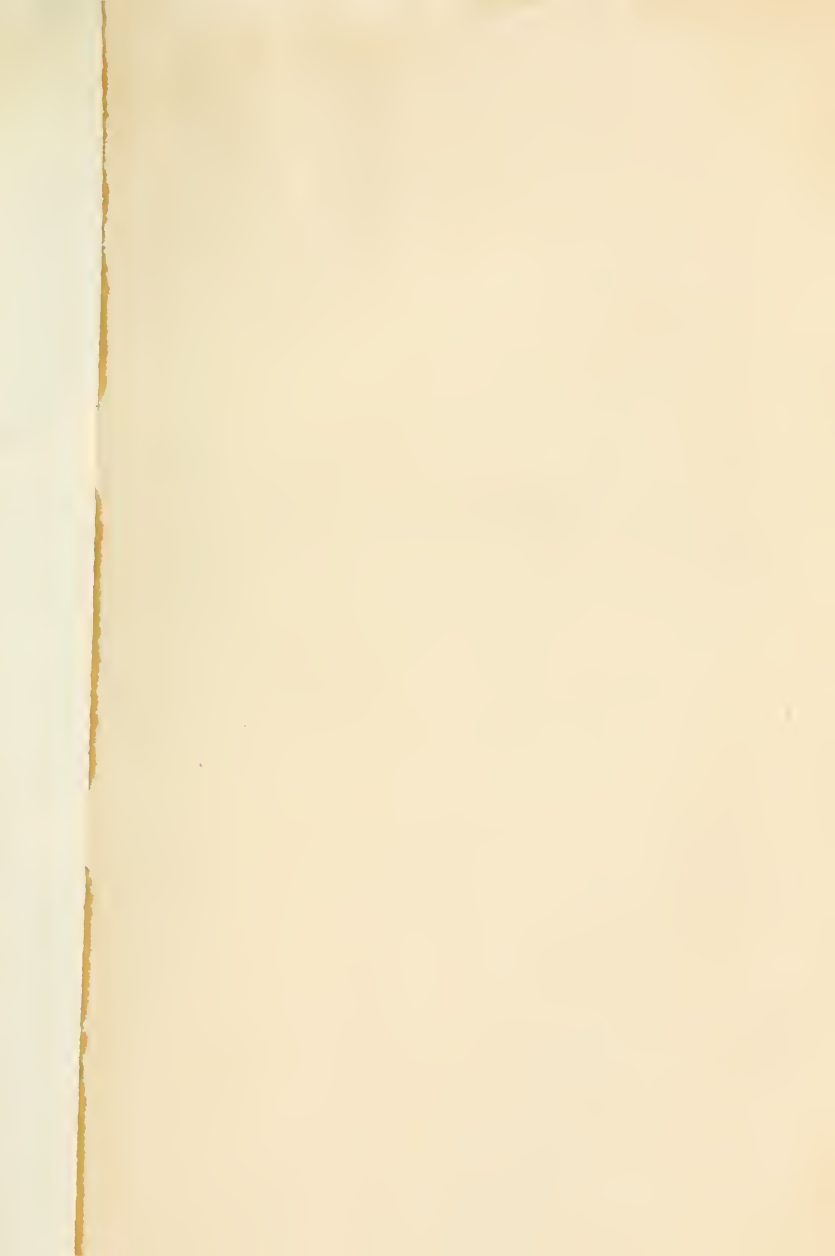


The Lady
from
Long Acre

Victor Bridges







By Victor Bridges

A Rogue by Compulsion

The Lady from Long Acre

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Then, just in the nick of time, he turned to meet the driver of the cart. There was no chance of repeating his former tactics, for the sheer weight of the latter's rush had brought him into close quarters, and the next instant they were swaying up and down clutched in each other's arms.

The Lady from Long Acre

By

Victor Bridges

Author of "A Rogue by Compulsion," "The Man from Nowhere,"
"Jetsam"

Illustrated by Ray Rohn

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The Lady from Long Acre

CHAPTER I

"TIGER" BUGG VERSUS "LIGHTNING" LOPEZ

LADY JOCELYN sighed gently and put down her cup on the tea-table.

"I suppose, Tony," she said, "that when one gets to seventy-two, one's conscience begins to decay just as one's body does. I seem to like good people less and immoral and useless ones more. You are the only member of the family it gives me the faintest pleasure to see nowadays."

Sir Antony Raymond Fulk Desmoleyn Conway—Conway Bart., more commonly known as Tony, nodded his head.

"They are rather a stuffy lot the others, aren't they!" he answered cheerfully. "Who's been round to see you?"

"Only Laura and Henry as yet." Lady Jocelyn spoke with some thankfulness.

"Well, that's enough," observed Tony. "Ten

minutes with either of them always makes me feel I want to do something improper."

"Allowing for age and infirmity," said Lady Jocelyn, "they have a rather similar effect on me."

Tony laughed. "So you have heard all about my misdeeds?"

"I would hardly go as far as that. They were only here for two hours. You may smoke you know, Tony, if you want to."

He lighted a cigarette. "Tell me, Aunt Fanny," he pleaded. "There is no pleasure in blackening the family name unless one hears what the family says about it."

"The family," remarked Lady Jocelyn, "has a good deal to say about it. They consider that not only are you wasting your own life in the most deplorable manner, but that your methods of amusing yourself are calculated to bring a certain amount of discredit upon your more distinguished relatives. Henry attributes it chiefly to the demoralizing effect of wealth; Laura thinks that you were born with naturally low tastes."

"They're both right," observed Tony placidly. "I am what Guy calls 'a menace to my order.' That's a jolly way for one's secretary to talk to one, isn't it?"

"It's the only way dear Guy can talk, and after all I daresay he is telling the truth."

"I am sure he is," said Tony. "Guy is quite incapable of telling anything else." He paused. "Was Henry referring to any recent atrocity?"

“I think your choice of friends is what distresses him chiefly. He said that your more intimate acquaintances appear to consist of prize-fighters and chauffeurs.”

Tony laughed good-humouredly. “I do a bit of motor racing, you know. I suppose that’s what he meant by chauffeurs. As for prize-fighters—well, somebody must have been telling him about Bugg.”

“About what?” inquired Lady Jocelyn mildly.

“Bugg,” repeated Tony. “‘Tiger’ Bugg. He’s a youthful protégé of mine—a boxer. In about three years, when he’s grown a bit, he’ll be champion of England.”

Lady Jocelyn’s good-humoured face wrinkled up into a whimsical smile.

“Dear Tony,” she said. “Your conversation is always so stimulating. Tell me some more about Mr. Tiger Bugg. What a name! It sounds like some kind of American butterfly.”

“Oh, he spells it with two g’s,” said Tony. “It’s a very good name in the East End of London. There have been Buggs in Whitechapel for generations.”

“So I have always understood,” replied Lady Jocelyn. “How did you come across this particular branch of the family?”

“It was at a boxing club off the Stepney High Street. It’s a blackguard sort of place run by a Jew named Isaacs. He gets in the East End street boys, and they fight each other for nothing in the hope that some boxing promoter will see them and give them a

chance. Well, one night when I was there they put up this boy Bugg against a fellow who was big enough to eat him—a chap who knew something about the game, too. Bugg was hammered nearly silly in the first round, but he came up for the second and popped in a left hook bang on the point that put the big chap to sleep for almost ten minutes. It was one of the prettiest things I've ever seen."

"It sounds delightful," said Lady Jocelyn. "Go on, Tony."

"I was so pleased with his pluck," pursued the baronet tranquilly, "that I sent for him after the show and took him out to have some supper. I thought he was precious hungry from the way he wolfed his food, and when I asked him I found he'd had nothing to eat all day except a bit of dry bread for breakfast. In addition to that he had tramped about ten miles looking for a job. Hardly what one would call a good preparation for fighting a fellow twice your size."

"It seems a most deserving case," remarked Lady Jocelyn sympathetically.

"That's what I thought," said Tony. "I had him up to Hampstead the next day and I gave him a good try out with the gloves. I saw at once that I'd got hold of something quite out of the common. He didn't know much about the science of the game, but he was just a born boxer—one of those boys who take to fighting as naturally as they do to breathing. He seemed a decent lad too in his way—a bit rough, of course, but then you couldn't expect anything else.

Anyhow the end of it was I took him on, and he has been with me ever since.”

“How nice!” said Lady Jocelyn. “And in what capacity does he figure in the household returns?”

Tony indulged in a smile. “I always call him my assistant secretary,” he said, “just to fetch old Guy. As a matter of fact Bugg is a most useful chap. There’s hardly anything he can’t do. When he isn’t training for a fight, we use him as a sort of maid-of-all-work.”

“Oh, he still fights then?”

“Rather,” said Tony. “He has never been beaten yet. Backing Bugg is my only source of income apart from the estate. I made twelve hundred pounds out of him last year.”

“Dear me!” exclaimed Lady Jocelyn. “I had no idea you had a regular profession like that, Tony. What sort of people does he fight with?”

“We are open to meet any one in the world up to ten stone seven. In fact there are only about four who really matter that he hasn’t met. There will be one less after to-morrow.”

“What happens to-morrow?”

“Bugg is going to fight ‘Lightning Lopez’ at the Cosmopolitan.”

“What beautiful names all these people seem to have,” said Lady Jocelyn. “Who is ‘Lightning Lopez’?”

“He calls himself the champion welter-weight of Europe,” replied Tony a little contemptuously.

He's half an American and half a Livadian. That's why Pedro has taken him up."

"Pedro?" repeated Lady Jocelyn. "Do you mean King Pedro?"

Tony nodded. "Yes, Lopez is being backed by royalty or rather ex-royalty. We hope to have five hundred of the best out of His Majesty by to-morrow night."

"Are you a friend of Pedro's?" asked Lady Jocelyn.

"Oh, hardly that," said Tony. "He belongs to the Cosmo, you know, and I often meet him at races and first nights."

Lady Jocelyn paused for a moment.

"I remember him very well as a little boy at Portriga before the revolution," she said. "What has he grown up like?"

"Well," observed Tony, thoughtfully brushing some cigarette ash from his sleeve, "he's short and fat and dark and rather spotty, and he drinks too much."

Lady Jocelyn nodded. "Ah!" she said, "just like his poor father. Has he inherited the family weakness for female society?"

"He's a bit of a rip," said Tony. "Or rather he was. Molly Monk of the Gaiety has got hold of him now, and I think she keeps him pretty straight. She's not the sort to stand any nonsense, you know."

"I will take your word for it, Tony," said Lady Jocelyn gravely.

Tony laughed. “Well, you can, Aunt Fanny,” he returned. “I’ve known Molly since she was a little flapper. She is the granddaughter of old Monk who used to look after the lodge at Holbeck.”

Lady Jocelyn raised her eyebrows. “Dear me!” she exclaimed. “Is that so, Tony! Why I remember the old man perfectly. She must be a clever girl to have got on like she has. What a pity she couldn’t be content with her profession.”

“Oh, Molly’s all right,” said Tony carelessly. “She’s straight enough as girls of that sort go. You can be quite sure she’s really fond of Pedro or she wouldn’t have anything to do with him.”

“He didn’t sound exactly lovable from your description of him,” remarked Lady Jocelyn.

“Well, perhaps I didn’t do him justice. He isn’t such a bad fellow in his way, you know. He drinks too much and he’s stupid and spoilt, but he’s quite good-natured and amiable with it. I have no doubt Molly can twist him round her finger; and I suppose there’s a certain attraction in having a king trotting around after you—even if he is out of a job. No doubt it annoys the other girls.”

“As a bachelor, my dear boy,” said Lady Jocelyn, “you have no right to be so well acquainted with feminine weaknesses.” She paused. “You know you really ought to get married, Tony,” she added, “if only to circulate your income.”

Tony laughed. “You have hit on my one strong point as a capitalist,” he said. “You ask Guy, Aunt Fanny!”

"But you can't spend forty thousand a year by yourself—surely?"

"Oh, I get a little help now and then. I don't know that I really want it though. It's wonderful what one can do with practice and a steam yacht."

"It's not nearly as wonderful as what you could do with a wife," said Lady Jocelyn. "Anyhow you ought to get married if only to please me. I shall soon be too old for travelling about, and then I shall want some really naughty children to give me an interest in life. I shall never be interested in Henry's twins: they are such dreadful little prigs."

Tony got up from his chair and taking the old lady's slender, much beringed hand raised it to his lips.

"If you feel like that, Aunt Fanny," he said, "I shall certainly have to think about it. You won't mind who she is, I suppose?"

"I only make two stipulations," said Lady Jocelyn. "She mustn't be a German and she mustn't wear squeaky boots."

Tony laughed. "All right, Aunt Fanny," he said. "I can promise you that safely."

He walked to the window and glanced down into Chester Square where a huge venomous-looking, two-seated Peugeot was filling up the roadway.

"I must toddle away now," he observed. "I want to run up to the Club, and see that everything's all right for to-morrow night, and then I must get back home and change. I have promised to go to this fancy dress dance at the Albert Hall, and it will

take me a long time to look like Charles the Second.”

Lady Jocelyn leaned forward and rang the bell. “Come and see me again some day, Tony,” she said, “when you have nothing better to do. I shall be home till the end of July, at all events.”

Tony bent down and kissed her affectionately. “I shall often be dropping in if I may,” he said. “I am always in scrapes you know, Aunt Fanny, and you are about the only person I can look to for a little sympathy and encouragement.”

“If my moral support is of any use, Tony,” she said, “you can count on it to the utmost.”

Outside the house a small crowd of loafers and errand boys had gathered round the car, which with its enormous strapped bonnet and disk wheels looked singularly out of place in this trim, respectable neighbourhood.

“Wotyer call that, guv’nor?” inquired one of them. “A cycle car?”

“It’s the new Baby Peugeot,” replied Tony gravely.

He started up the engine, and climbing into the seat, disappeared round the corner, followed by the admiring glances of his audience.

The Cosmopolitan Club, the headquarters of British pugilism, is situated in Covent Garden. It is regarded by some excellent people as a plague spot that will eventually be wiped away by the rising flood of a more humanized civilization, but this opinion can hardly be said to represent the views of the porter and carmen who frequent the vicinity. To them the

Club represents all that is best and brightest in English civilization, and amongst its numerous and oddly assorted members nobody could claim to be better known or more popular than Tony.

As the big car picked its way over the cobbles, twisting neatly in and out between unattended carts and piles of empty baskets, a good number of the men who were lounging about greeted the owner with a friendly salute. When he reached the Club and pulled up, several of them stepped forward eagerly to open the door.

"'Ow abaht ter-morrer, sir," inquired one huge, hoarse-voiced carter. "Sife to shove a bit on Tiger?"

"You can shove your horse and cart on him," said Tony, "and if it doesn't come off I'll buy you another."

He jumped out and crossed the pavement, followed by an approving murmur from everyone who had heard his offer.

The carter spat decisively into the gutter. "'E's a ruddy nobleman, 'e is," he observed, looking round the group with a bloodshot eye. "'Oo says 'e ain't?"

No one ventured on such a rash assertion; indeed, putting aside the carter's discouraging air, everyone present considered Tony's offer to be the very acme of aristocratic behaviour.

The creator of this favourable impression pushed open the swinging door of the Club and, accepting a couple of letters from the hotel porter, walked

through into the comfortably furnished bar lounge at the back. Its two inhabitants, who were each in the act of consuming a cocktail, glanced round at his entrance. One was “Doggy” Donaldson, the manager, a burly, genial-looking, bullet-headed individual with close-cropped grey hair, and a permanently unlit cigar jutting up rakishly out of the corner of his mouth.

“Hello, Tony,” he exclaimed. “You’re just in time to join us. You know the Marquis da Freitas, of course?”

Tony nodded easily, and Donaldson’s companion, a stout, dark-complexioned, well-dressed man of about fifty with a certain air of distinction about him, returned the greeting with a courteous wave of his hand.

“We meet as enemies, Sir Antony,” he remarked smilingly.

“Well, I just dropped in for a second to see that everything was all right about to-morrow,” said Tony. “Our boy is in fine form: never been fitter. I hope you have been equally lucky?”

The Marquis indulged in the faintest possible shrug of his broad shoulders. “I believe so,” he said. “I am not a great authority on these matters myself, but they amuse His Majesty.”

“Everything’s O. K.,” observed the manager in a satisfied voice. “We sold the last seat this morning, and there have been several applications since. It’s going to be the best night of the season. You will see your boy turns up in good time, won’t you?”

Tony helped himself to the cocktail, which the barman, without asking any superfluous questions, had been quietly preparing for him.

"Right you are," he said, drinking it off. "What's the betting, Doggy?"

"Martin-Smith told me this morning he'd got a level hundred on Lopez."

Tony put down the empty glass. "Ah well," he said, "he can afford to lose it."

There was a short pause.

"You seem confident, Sir Antony," remarked the Marquis in his suave voice. "Perhaps you would like to back your opinion a little further. I don't know much about this sort of thing, as I said just now, but I am prepared to support our man if only from patriotic motives."

"Anything you care to suggest, Marquis," said Tony indifferently.

"Shall we say a couple of hundred, then?"

Tony nodded, and booked the bet on his shirt cuff.

"I must be off now," he said. "I suppose you and the King will be at the Albert Hall to-night?"

The Marquis shook his head. "I do not think His Majesty intends to be present. As for me—" he again shrugged his shoulders—"I grow old for such frivolities."

"Well, till to-morrow then," said Tony.

He passed out again through the hall, and jumping into the car steered his way slowly round the corner into Long Acre, where he branched off in the direction

of Piccadilly. He was just passing Garnett's, the celebrated theatrical costumier, when the door of that eminent establishment swung open, and a very pretty and smartly dressed girl stepped out on to the pavement. Directly Tony saw her he checked the car and turned it gently in towards the gutter.

She came up to him with a most attractive smile.

“But how convenient, Tony,” she exclaimed. “You will be able to drive me home. I was just going to waste my money on a taxi.”

He leaned across and opened the door. “You can give me the bob instead, Molly,” he said. “Jump in.”

She stepped up alongside of him, and with a harsh croak the big car glided forward again into the thronging bustle of Leicester Square.

“Funny picking you up like this,” he said. “I’ve just been talking about you.”

“I’m always being talked about,” replied Molly serenely. “I hope you weren’t as nasty as most people.”

“I was saying that you were the only girl in London with that particular shade of red hair.” Tony brought out this shameless untruth with the utmost coolness.

“It is rather nice, isn’t it?” said Molly. “All the girls think I touch it up. As a matter of fact it’s one of the few parts of me I don’t.” She paused. “What were you really saying about me, Tony?”

“Oh, quite nice things,” he replied. “Can you fancy me saying anything else?”

"No," she said. "I'll admit you're an amiable beast as men go. But why haven't you been to see me lately?"

Grasping his opportunity Tony darted across the bows of an onrushing motor-bus, and gained the comparative shelter of Regent Street.

"If it *is* a fact," he observed, "I can only attribute it to idiocy."

"You know it's a fact," said Molly, "and it's hurt me, Tony. I wouldn't mind being chucked by any one else. But somehow you're different. I have always looked on you as a pal."

Tony slipped his left hand off the wheel for a second and lightly squeezed hers.

"So I am, Molly," he said. "Why on earth should I have changed?"

"I thought you might be sick with me about—well, about Peter."

"Good Lord, no," said Tony. "I never criticize my friends' hobbies. If I haven't routed you out lately, it's only because I've been really busy."

Her face brightened. "You're a nice old thing, Tony," she said. "Come and lunch with me to-morrow if you're not booked up. Just us two. I really do want to have a talk with you, badly."

"Right-o," said Tony. "You'll be able to give me the latest stable information about Lopez. It's the fight to-morrow night, you know."

Molly nodded. "Peter thinks he's going to win all right," she said. "He's cocksure about it."

"I gathered that," said Tony. "I ran into da

“Tiger” Bugg vs. “Lightning” Lopez 15

Freitas at the Club just now and he bet me a level two hundred we were in for a whipping. I shouldn't think he was a gentleman who chucked away his money out of patriotic sentiment.”

Molly made as near an approach to an ugly face as nature would allow.

“You don't like him?” inquired Tony artlessly.

“He's a pig,” said Molly, and then after a short pause she added with some reluctance, “but he's a clever pig.”

“That,” observed Tony, “only aggravates the offence.”

He pulled up at Basil Mansions, a big block of luxurious flats just opposite the Langham Hotel, and a magnificently gilded porter hastened forward to open the door of the car.

“I'll tell you about him to-morrow,” said Molly. “Don't be later than half-past one. I'm always starving by then, and I shan't wait for you.”

“I am always punctual for meals,” said Tony. “It's the only virtue that's rewarded on the spot.”

CHAPTER II

THE MORALS OF MOLLY

IT was exactly eleven o'clock when Tony woke up. He looked at his watch, yawned, stretched himself, ran his fingers through his hair, and then reaching out his hand pressed the electric bell beside his bed. After a short pause it was answered by a middle-aged, clean-shaven man, with a face like a tired sphinx, who entered the room carrying a cup of tea upon a tray. Tony sat up and blinked at him.

"Good-morning, Spalding," he observed.

"Good-morning, Sir Antony," returned the man; "I trust that you slept well, sir?"

"Very well, thank you," replied Tony. "What time did I get home?"

"I fancy it was a little after four, sir."

Tony took a long drink out of the tea-cup, and then put it down again. "I am curiously thirsty this morning, Spalding," he said. "Was I quite sober when I came back?"

The man hesitated. "I should describe you as being so, sir," he replied.

"Thank you, Spalding," said Tony gratefully.

Crossing the room the valet drew up the blinds, and admitted a cheerful stream of sunshine.

"Mr. Oliver left a message, sir, to say that he would not be back until the afternoon. He has gone out on business and is lunching with Mr. Henry Conway."

"Where's Bugg?" inquired Tony.

"At the present moment, sir, I believe he is in the gymnasium. He informed me that he was about to loosen his muscles with a little shadow boxing."

"Is he all right?"

"He appears to be in the most robust health, sir."

A look of relief passed across Tony's face. "You have taken a weight off my mind, Spalding," he said. "I dreamed that he had broken his neck."

The valet shook his head reassuringly.

"I observed no sign of it, sir, when I passed him in the hall."

"In that case," said Tony, "I think I shall get up. You can fill the bath, Spalding, and you can tell the cook I shan't want any breakfast."

The impassive servant bowed and withdrew from the room, and after finishing his tea, Tony got luxuriously out of bed, and proceeded to drape himself in a blue silk dressing-gown with gold dragons embroidered round the hem. It was a handsome garment originally intended for the President of China, but that gentleman had unexpectedly rejected it on the ground that it was too ornate for the elected head of a democratic community. At least that was

how the Bond Street shopman who had sold it to Tony had accounted for its excessive price.

Lighting a cigarette, Tony sauntered across to the bathroom, where a shave, a cold tub, and a few minutes of Muller's exercises were sufficient to remove the slight trace of lassitude induced by his impersonation of Charles the Second. Then, still clad in his dressing-gown, he strolled down the main staircase, and opening the front door passed out into the garden.

The house was one of those two or three jolly old-fashioned survivals which still stand in their own grounds in the neighbourhood of Jack Straw's Castle. Tony had bought up the freehold several years previously, the quaint old Georgian residence in its delightful surroundings appealing to him far more than his own gloomy family mansion in Belgrave Square. As he himself was fond of explaining, it gave one all the charm of living in the country without any of its temptations to virtue.

A few yards' walk along a gravel path, hedged in on each side by thick laurel bushes, brought him to the gymnasium. The door was slightly open, and from the quick patter and shuffle of footsteps inside, it sounded as if a number of ballet girls were practising a novel and rather complicated form of step dance.

The spectacle that actually met Tony's eyes when he entered, however, was of a less seductive nature. Clad only in a pair of flannel trousers, a young man was spinning and darting about the room in the most

extraordinary fashion, indulging at the same time in lightning-like movements with his head and arms. To the uninitiated observer he would have appeared to be either qualifying for a lunatic asylum or else attempting the difficult feat of catching flies on the wing. As a matter of fact either assumption would have been equally inaccurate. He was engaged in what is known amongst pugilists as "shadow boxing" which consists of conducting an animated contest with a vicious but imaginary opponent.

On seeing Tony the young man in question came to an abrupt halt in the middle of the room, and raised his forefinger to his close-cropped forehead.

"Mornin', Sir Ant'ny," he observed.

Notwithstanding his exertions he spoke without the least trace of breathlessness, and there was no sign of perspiration upon his clean white skin. He looked what he was—a splendidly built lad of about nineteen, trained to the last pitch of physical fitness.

Tony glanced him over with an approving eye. "Good-morning, Bugg," he answered. "I am glad to see you looking so well. I dreamed you had broken your neck."

The lad grinned cheerfully. "Not me, sir. Never felt better in me life. Must 'a bin the other bloke."

"I hope not," said Tony anxiously. "I backed you for another two-fifty yesterday, and I can't very well claim the money unless the fight comes off. By the way, a hundred of that goes on to the purse if you do the trick all right."

The young prize-fighter looked a trifle embarrassed. "There ain't no call for that, sir—thankin' ye kindly all the saime, sir. I'd knock out 'alf a dozen blokes like Lopez for a purse o' three 'undred."

"Your unmercenary nature is one of your chief charms, Bugg," said Tony. "All the same you mustn't carry it to extremes. How much money have you got in the bank now?"

Bugg scratched his ear. "The last time I goes in, sir, the old geezer with the whiskers says somethin' abaht a matter of eleven 'undred quid."

"Well, by to-morrow you ought to have fifteen hundred. In other words, Bugg, you will be a capitalist—one of the idle rich. That money, properly invested, will bring you in thirty shillings a week. If you want to set up as an independent gentleman now's the time to begin."

A sudden look of surprised dismay spread itself across Bugg's square-jawed face.

"Meanin' I got the chuck, sir?" he inquired dully.

Tony laughed. "Of course not," he said. "Don't be an ass, Bugg. I was only pointing out to you that if you like to set up on your own you can afford to do it. I'll go on backing you as long as you want me to, but you needn't feel bound to stop on here if you'd rather clear out. It's not much of a job for a budding champion of England with fifteen hundred pounds in the bank."

Bugg gave an audible sigh of relief:

"I thought you was 'andin' me the bird, sir," he

observed. "Give me a proper turn it did, jest for the minit."

"Then you don't want to go?"

Bugg laughed, almost contemptuously.

"Where'd I go to, sir?" he demanded. "'Ow long would that fifteen 'undred last if I was knockin' arahnd on me own with every flash cove in London 'avin' a cut at it? 'Sides, that, sir, I don't want nothin' different. I wouldn't change the job I got, not to be King of England. If it weren't for you I'd be 'awkin' welks now, or fightin' in a booth, an' Tiger Bugg ain't the sort to forget a thing like that. W'en you don't want me no more, sir, jest you tip me the orfice straight and proper and I'll 'op it, but so long as there's any bloomin' thing I *can* do for you, sir, well, 'ere I am and 'ere I means to stop."

It was the longest speech that Tiger Bugg had ever indulged in, and certainly the most eloquent. Tony, who was genuinely touched by the obvious sincerity with which it was uttered, stepped forward and patted the lad on his shoulder.

"That's all right, Tiger," he said. "There will always be a job for you here if it's only to annoy my relations." He paused and lighted himself another cigarette. "Give us a bit of your best to-night," he added. "I should like to make da Freitas look silly, and if you win easily, Donaldson has practically promised me a match for the Lonsdale Belt."

Bugg's eyes gleamed, and his hands automatically clenched themselves.

"I'll slip one over the fust chance I get, sir," he observed earnestly. "I don't think I'll 'ave to wait long either."

Tony nodded, and gathering up his dressing-gown, turned towards the door.

"Well, be ready by eight o'clock," he said, "and we'll go down together in the car."

Leaving the gymnasium he strolled on up the path till it curved round the corner and opened out into an asphalt yard, where a man in blue overalls was attending to the toilet of the big Peugeot. He was a tall, red-haired individual with an expression of incurable melancholy on his face.

"Good-morning, Jennings," said Tony. "It's a nice morning, isn't it?"

The chauffeur cast a resentful glance at the unclouded blue overhead.

"It's all right at present, sir," he admitted grudgingly, "but these here extra fine mornings have a way of turning off sudden."

Tony sauntered up to the car, and lifting the bonnet looked down into the gleaming network of copper and brass which bore eloquent testimony to the care and energy expended on it.

"I didn't think she was pulling quite at her best yesterday," he said. "You might have a run through and tune her up a bit, when you've got time."

The chauffeur nodded. "Once these here big racin' engines begin to give trouble, sir," he remarked with a sort of gloomy relish, "they ain't never the

same again—not in a manner o' speaking. Least, that's how it seems to me."

"That's how it would seem to you, Jennings," said Tony kindly. "Is the Suiza all right?"

"She'll run, sir."

"Well, have her ready about one o'clock, and I shall want you and the Rolls-Royce at eight to-night, to take us down to the Club." He paused. "I suppose you have backed Bugg?" he added.

Jennings shook his head. "Not me, sir. I think he's flying too high, sir. From all they tell me this here Lopez is a terror. I'll be sorry to see Bugg knocked out, but there it is; it comes to all of 'em in time."

"I like talking to you after breakfast, Jennings," said Tony. "You cheer one up for the entire day."

Jennings received the compliment with an utterly unmoved expression. "I don't take much stock in bein' cheerful meself, sir," he observed, "not unless there's something to be cheerful about."

He stepped forward and resumed his work on the car, and after watching him for a moment or two with a pleasant languid interest Tony turned round and sauntered back to the house.

He finished his toilet in a leisurely fashion, and then spent an agreeable half-hour over the *Sportsman*, which was the only morning paper that he took in. Current affairs of a more general nature did not interest him much, though in times of national or political crisis it was his habit to borrow the *Daily Mail* from Spalding.

Soon after one, Jennings brought the Suiza round to the front door, and a quarter of an hour later Tony turned in through the gateway of Basil Mansions and drew up alongside the rockery and fountain with which a romantic landlord had enriched the centre of the courtyard.

Leaving the car there, he strolled across to Molly's flat and rang the bell. It was answered almost at once by a neatly dressed French maid, who conducted him into a bright and daintily furnished room where Molly was sitting at the piano practising a new song. She jumped up gaily directly she saw him.

"Oh, how nice of you, Tony," she exclaimed. "You are ten minutes early and I'm fearfully hungry. Lunch as soon as it's ready, Claudine."

She gave Tony her hand which he raised gallantly to his lips.

"You are looking very beautiful this morning, Molly," he said. "You remind me of one of those things that come out of ponds."

"What do you mean?" asked Molly. "Frogs?"

"No," said Tony, "not frogs. Those sort of jolly wet girls with nothing on; what do you call them—naiads, isn't it?"

Molly burst into a ripple of laughter. "I don't think that's much of a compliment to my frock, Tony," she said. "It was specially designed for me by Jay's too! Don't you like it?"

Tony stepped back and inspected her critically.

"It's wonderful," he said. "I should imagine

Mr. Jay was now prostrate with nervous exhaustion."

"Oh, well," replied Molly comfortingly, "he'll have heaps of time to recover before he's paid."

The clear note of a silver gong sounded from the passage and she thrust her arm through Tony's.

"Come along," she said, "there are roast quails and it would be awful if they got cold, wouldn't it?"

Tony gave a slight shudder. "There are some tragedies," he said, "that one hardly likes to think about."

All through lunch, which was daintily served in Molly's pretty, sunny little dining-room, they chatted away in the easy cheerful fashion of two people who have no illusions about each other and are yet the firmest of friends. The lunch itself was excellent, and Claudine waited on them with a graceful skill that lent an additional harmony to its progress.

"I think I am in love with your new maid," observed Tony thoughtfully, when she at length left them to their coffee and cigarettes.

"I am glad you approve of her," said Molly, "but if you haven't seen her before it only shows how disgustingly you must have treated me. She has been here since Christmas."

"I like her face," pursued Tony. "It's so pure. She looks as if she had been turned out of a convent for being too good."

"She isn't good," said Molly. "Don't you think it."

"That only makes her all the more wonderful," said Tony. "To look good and to be wicked is the ideal combination. You get the benefits of both without any of their drawbacks."

"In that case," observed Molly, "I must be dead out of luck. With my red hair and red lips I look desperately wicked, while as a matter of fact I'm quite uninterestingly good—by instinct." She paused. "I want to talk to you about my morals, Tony. That has been one of the chief reasons why I asked you to lunch."

Tony poured out a glass of liqueur brandy. "The morals of Molly," he remarked contentedly. "I can't imagine a more perfect subject for an after-lunch discussion."

Molly lit herself a cigarette and passed him across the little silver box. "It's not so much a discussion as an explanation," she said. "I want to explain Peter." She sat back in her chair. "You see, Tony, you're the only person in the world whose opinion I care a hang for. If it hadn't been for you I don't know what would have happened to me after I ran away from home. You helped me to get on the stage, and I don't want you to think I've turned out an absolute rotter. Oh, I know people have always said horrid things about me, but then they do that about any girl in musical comedy. I believe I'm supposed to have lived with a Rajah and had a black baby, and Lord knows what else, but as a matter of fact it's all lies and invention. People talk like that just to appear more in the swim than

somebody else. Of course I don't mean to say I haven't had lots of kind offers of that sort, but until Peter came along I'd said 'no' to all of them."

"What made you pitch on Peter?" asked Tony.

"I don't know," said Molly frankly. "I think I was sorry for him to start with. He's so stupid you know—any one can take him in, and that little cat Marie d'Estelle was getting thousands out of him and carrying on all the time with half a dozen other men. So I thought I'd just take him away if only to teach her common decency."

"If rumour is correct," observed Tony, "the lesson was not entirely successful."

Molly laughed. "Well, that was how the thing started anyway," she said. "Peter got awfully keen on me, and after I had seen a little bit of him and snubbed him rather badly once or twice for being too affectionate, I really began to get quite fond of him. You see if he wasn't a king he'd be a jolly good sort. There's nothing really the matter with him except that he's been horribly spoilt. He isn't a bit vicious naturally; he only thought he was until he met me. He is weak and stupid, of course, but then I like a man not to be too clever if I am going to have much to do with him. Stupid men stick to you, and you can make them do just what you want. You know Peter consults me about practically everything."

"And what does da Freitas think of the situation?" asked Tony mildly.

"Oh, da Freitas!" Molly's expression was an

answer in itself. "He hates me, Tony; he can't stand any one having an influence over Peter except himself. He didn't mind d'Estelle and people like that, in spite of the money they cost, but he would give anything to get rid of me. He likes Peter to be weak and dissipated and not to bother about things, because then he has all the power in his own hands."

"But how is all this going to end, Molly?" asked Tony. "Suppose there's another revolution in Livadia, and Peter, as you call him, has to go back to be King. It's quite on the cards according to what one hears."

"Oh, I know," said Molly, shrugging her shoulders, "but what's the good of worrying? If they knew Peter as well as I do they wouldn't be so stupid. He'd be no earthly use as a king, by himself, and he'd look too absolutely silly for words with a crown on his head. As far as his own private tastes go, he's a lot happier at Richmond. He quite sees it too, you know, when I point it out to him, but he says he wouldn't be able to help himself if there really was a revolution."

"No," said Tony. "I imagine da Freitas would see to that. It will be a precious cold day when he gets left. He hasn't schemed and plotted and kept in with Pedro all this time in order to let the chance slip when it comes along. If he isn't back there one day in his old job of Prime Minister, it won't be the fault of the Marquis Fernando."

Molly looked pensively into the fire. "He only

makes one mistake," she said. "He's a little too apt to think other people are more stupid than they are. I suppose it comes from associating so much with poor old Peter."

CHAPTER III

TWO YELLOW-FACED FOREIGNERS

VERY carefully Tony sprinkled a little Bengal pepper over the perfectly grilled sole which Spalding had set down in front of him. Then he returned the bottle to the cruet-stand and looked across the table at his cousin.

"You really ought to come to-night, Guy," he said. "It will be a beautiful fight while it lasts."

Guy Oliver shook his head. He was a tall, rather gaunt young man with a pleasant but too serious expression. "My dear Tony," he replied, "my tastes may be peculiar, but as I have told you before, it really gives me no pleasure to watch two lads striking each other violently about the face and body."

"You were always hard to please," complained Tony sadly. "Fighting is one of the few natural and healthy occupations left to humanity."

Guy adjusted his glasses. "I am not criticizing fighting in its proper place," he said. "I think there are times when it may be necessary and even enjoyable. All I do object to is regarding it as a pastime. There are some things in life that we

are not meant to make a popular spectacle out of. What would you say if someone suggested paying people to make love to each other on public platforms?"

"I should say it would be most exciting," said Tony. "Especially the heavy-weight championship." He poured himself out half a glass of sherry and held it up to the light. "Talking of heavy-weights," he added, "how did you find our dear Cousin Henry?"

"Henry was very well," said Guy. "He is coming to see you."

Tony put down his glass and surveyed his cousin reproachfully. "And you call yourself a secretary and a friend?" he remarked.

"I think it is very good for you to entertain Cousin Henry occasionally," returned Guy. "He is an excellent antidote to the Cosmopolitan Club and Brooklands." He paused. "Besides, he has a suggestion to make with which I am thoroughly in sympathy."

A depressed expression flitted across Tony's face. "I am sure it has something to do with my duty," he said.

Guy nodded. "I wish you would try and look on it in that light. Henry has put himself to a lot of trouble about it, and he will be very hurt if you don't take it seriously."

"My dear Guy!" said Tony. "A proposal of Henry's with which you are in sympathy couldn't possibly be taken any other way. What is it?"

"He has set his heart on your going into Parliament as you know. Well, he told me that last week he had spoken about you to the Chief Whip, and that they are arranging for you to stand as Government candidate for Balham North at the next general election."

There was a long pause.

"For where?" inquired Tony faintly.

"For Balham North. It's a large constituency in South London close to Upper Tooting."

"It would be," said Tony. "And may I ask what I have done to deserve this horrible fate?"

"That's just it," said Guy. "You haven't done anything. Henry feels—indeed we all feel that as head of the family it is quite time you made a start."

"You don't understand," said Tony with some dignity. "I am sowing my wild oats. It is what every wealthy young baronet is expected to do."

"Leaving out the war," retorted Guy, "you have been sowing them for exactly six years and nine months."

Tony smiled contentedly. "I always think," he observed, "that if a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well."

There was another pause, while Guy, crumbling a bit of bread between his fingers, regarded his cousin with a thoughtful scrutiny.

"As far as I can see, Tony," he said, "there is only one thing that's the least likely to do you any good. You want a complete change in your life—something that will wake you up to a sense of

duty and responsibility. I think you ought to get married."

Tony, who was helping himself to a glass of champagne, paused abruptly in the middle of that engaging occupation.

"How remarkable!" he exclaimed. "Only yesterday Aunt Fanny made exactly the same suggestion. It must be something in the spring air."

"I don't always agree with Aunt Fanny," said Guy, "but I think that for once in a way she was giving you excellent advice. A good wife would make a tremendous difference in your life."

"Tremendous!" assented Tony with a shudder. "I should probably have to give up smoking in bed and come down to breakfast every morning."

"You would be all the better for it," said Guy firmly. "I was thinking, however, more of your general outlook on things. Marriage with the right woman might make you realize that your position carries with it certain duties that you ought to regard both as a privilege and a pleasure."

"Is going into Parliament one of them?" asked Tony.

"Certainly. As a large landowner you are just the type of man who is badly wanted in the House of Commons."

"They must be devilish hard up for legislators," said Tony. "Still, if you and Henry have made up your minds, I expect I shall have to do it." He paused. "I don't think I should like to be the

member for Balham North though," he added reflectively. "It sounds like the sort of place where a chorus girl's mother would live."

Any defence of the constituency which Guy may have had to offer was cut short by the re-entrance of Spalding.

"The car is at the door, sir," he observed.

"Aren't you going to finish your dinner?" inquired Guy, as Tony pushed back his chair.

The latter shook his head. "I never eat much before a fight," he said. "It prevents my getting properly excited." He got up from his seat. "Besides," he added, "I always take Bugg round to Shepherd's after he has knocked out his man, and we celebrate the victory with stout and oysters. It's Bugg's idea of Heaven."

He passed out into the hall where Spalding helped him on with his coat. Outside the front door stood a beautifully appointed Rolls-Royce limousine, painted the colour of silver and upholstered in grey Bedford cord. Jennings was at the wheel and inside sat Tiger Bugg and a large red-faced man with little twinkling black eyes. This latter was Mr. "Blink" McFarland, the celebrated proprietor of the Hampstead Heath Gymnasium, who acted as Tiger's trainer and sparring partner. They both touched their caps as Tony appeared.

"I wouldn't let 'im get out, sir," observed McFarland in a gruff voice. "Might 'a took a chill hangin' around."

"Quite right, Blink," replied Tony gravely.

"Lopez isn't to be sneezed at even by a future champion."

He lit himself a cigarette, and stepping inside closed the door behind him. Spalding made a signal to Jennings and the big car slid off noiselessly down the drive.

Tony turned to Bugg. "Feeling all right?" he inquired.

The young prize-fighter grinned amiably. "Fine, sir, thank ye, sir."

With an affectionate gesture, McFarland laid an enormous mottled hand on his charge's knee. "He's fit to jump out of 'is skin, sir; you take it from me. If he don't knock two sorts of blue 'ell out of that dirty faced dago I'll give up trainin' fighters and start keepin' rabbits."

"Lopez is supposed to have a bit of a punch himself, isn't he?" inquired Tony.

McFarland made a hoarse rumbling noise which was presumably intended for a laugh.

"All the better for us, sir. The harder 'e hits the more 'e'll hurt hisself. It's a forlorn jog punchin' Tiger. You might as well kick a pavin' stone."

Bugg, who was evidently susceptible to compliments, blushed like a schoolgirl, and then to cover his confusion turned an embarrassed gaze out of the window. The long descent of Haverstock Hill was flying past at a rare pace, for whatever might be Jennings's shortcomings as a cheerful companion he could certainly drive a car. Indeed it could scarcely have been more than ten minutes from the moment

they left the Heath, until, with a loud blast from the horn, they glided round the corner of the street into Covent Garden.

The pavement and roadway in front of the Cosmopolitan were filled by the usual rough-looking crowd that invariably congregates outside the Club on the occasion of a big fight. With surprising swiftness, however, a space was cleared for Tony's car, and as its three occupants stepped out, a hoarse excited buzz of "That's 'im! that's Tiger!" rose up all round them.

Bugg and McFarland hurried through into the Club; Tony stopping behind for a moment to give some directions to Jennings.

"You can put the car up at the R.A.C.," he said. "I'll telephone over when I want you."

He followed the others across the pavement, amid encouraging observations of, "Good-luck, me lord!" and one or two approving pats on the back from hearty if not overclean hands.

Bugg and his trainer had of course gone direct to their dressing-room, where Tony made no attempt to pursue them. He knew that Tiger's preparations were safe in McFarland's hands, so relinquishing his coat to one of the hall porters, he walked straight through to the big gymnasium where the Club contests were held.

It was an animated scene that met his eyes as he entered. A preliminary bout was in progress and round the raised and roped dais in the centre, with its blinding glare of light overhead, sat a thousand or

fifteen hundred of London's most eminent "sportsmen." They were nearly all in evening dress: the dazzling array of white shirt fronts and diamond studs affording a vivid testimony to the interest taken in pugilism by the most refined and educated classes.

As soon as the round was ended, Tony made his way slowly towards his seat by the ring-side, exchanging innumerable greetings as he passed along. Almost everybody seemed to know him, and he seemed to have a smile and a cheery word for them all.

A few yards from his destination he came across the Marquis da Freitas. That distinguished statesman was seated in the front row of chairs enjoying a big cigar, while beside him lounged a dark, squarely built, rather coarse-featured youth, who greeted Tony with an affable if slightly condescending wave of his hand. The latter was none other than His Majesty King Pedro the Fifth, the rightful though temporarily discarded ruler of Livadia.

Tony pulled up at this mark of Royal recognition and shook hands with the Marquis and his monarch. It was understood that on such occasions as the present the ex-king preferred to be regarded as an ordinary member of the Club.

"Everything is good I hope," he observed to Tony. "Your man he is up to the scratch—eh?"

He spoke English confidently, but with a marked foreign accent.

"Rather," said Tony. "Never been fitter in his life. No excuses if we're beaten."

Da Freitas blew out a philosophic puff of smoke. "Ah, Sir Antony," he observed, "that is one of your national virtues. You are good losers, you English. Perhaps you do not feel defeat as deeply as Southerners."

"Perhaps not," admitted Tony cheerfully. "Anyhow, it's not much good making a song about things, is it? One's bound to strike a snag occasionally."

The Marquis nodded. "In Livadia," he said softly, "we do not like to be beaten. We——"

There was a loud *tang* from the gong and the two boxers sprang up out of their respective corners to resume the fight. With a gesture of apology Tony moved along to his seat, where he found himself next to "Doggy" Donaldson, who was discharging his customary rôle of Master of the Ceremonies. He welcomed Tony with a grip of the hand.

"Glad you've turned up," he said. "I never feel really happy till both parties are in the Club. All serene?"

"As far as we're concerned," replied Tony.

Donaldson rubbed his hands. "That's good," he observed contentedly. "We'll have 'em in the ring by nine-thirty at latest. That'll just give us time to—Hullo! Look at that! Damned if Young Alf isn't chucking it."

One of the two contesting youths had suddenly stepped back and held out his hand to his opponent. He had just received a severe dig in the stomach, which had apparently convinced him for the moment

that boxing was an unfriendly and over-rated amusement.

With a grunt of disgust at such pusillanimity Donaldson clambered up into the ring, and in a stentorian voice announced the name of the winner. He then introduced two more lithe-limbed active-looking lads, who promptly set about the task of punching each other's heads with refreshing accuracy and vigour.

It was about a quarter-past nine when this bout came to an end, and preparations were begun for the principal event. Two buckets of clean water were brought in, and a large cardboard box containing a couple of new pairs of boxing-gloves was deposited in the centre of the ring. Then, while a truculent looking gentleman in flannel trousers and a sweater strolled about crushing lumps of resin beneath his feet, Doggy Donaldson again hoisted himself into the roped square, and held up his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have the pleasure to announce that the Committee has decided to match the winner of to-night's contest against Jack Rivers, the holder of the Lonsdale Welter Weight Belt."

The applause that greeted this statement had scarcely died away, when a louder and more enthusiastic outburst proclaimed the appearance of the boxers. They came on from different sides of the building each with a small army of seconds in attendance. Climbing up into opposite corners of the ring they bowed their acknowledgments to the audience, and then, after carefully rubbing their feet in the resin,

seated themselves on the small stools that had been placed in readiness.

A number of lengthy preliminaries followed. The bandages that each man wore on his hands were gravely inspected by one of his rival's seconds, while another opened the cardboard box, and selected one of the two pairs of gloves for his principal. They were nice-looking gloves, but to the casual observer they would have appeared to be constructed more for the purpose of conforming to the law than of really deadening the effect of a blow. By dint of much pulling and straining, however, each boxer managed to get them on, and then sat with a dressing-gown over his shoulders while "Doggy" Donaldson made the inevitable introductions.

"Gentlemen! A twenty three-minute round contest between 'Lightning' Lopez of Livadia on my right, and 'Tiger' Bugg of Hampstead on my left. The bout will be refereed by Mr. 'Dick' Fisher."

An elderly man in evening dress with a weather-beaten face, hard blue eyes, and a chin like the toe of a boot stepped up alongside the speaker and jerked his head at the audience. He was an ex-amateur champion of England, and one of the best judges of boxing in the world.

The gong sounded as a signal to clear the ring, and the cluster of seconds each side made a leisurely exit through the ropes. For a moment the two boxers were left sitting on their respective stools facing each other across the brilliantly lighted arena. Then came another clang, and with a simultaneous

movement they leaped lightly to their feet, and advanced swiftly but cautiously towards the centre.

To any one sufficiently pagan to admire the human form they made a pleasing and effective picture. Both nude, except for a pair of very short blue trunks, they moved forward with the lithe grace of a couple of young panthers. Under the pitiless glare of the big arc lamps the rippling muscles on their backs and shoulders were plainly visible. Bugg's white skin stood out in dazzling contrast to the swarthy colour of his opponent, but as far as bodily perfection went there seemed to be nothing to choose between them.

For a few seconds they circled stealthily round the ring sparring for an opening. Lopez, who had adopted a slightly crouching pose, was the more aggressive of the two. He was famed for the fierce impetuosity of his methods, and on his last appearance at the Club he had signalized the occasion by knocking out his adversary in the second round.

In the present instance, however, he appeared to be a little at a loss. There was nothing very unusual to the eye about Bugg's style, but the almost contemptuous ease with which he brushed aside a couple of lightning-like left leads was distinctly disconcerting to his opponent.

Realizing apparently that as far as quickness and skill went he had met more than his match, the Livadian evidently decided that his usual robust tactics might be the most effective. He drew back a pace, and then slightly dropping his head, sprang in

with the vicious fury of a wildcat, hitting out fiercely with both hands.

The suddenness of the attack would have taken most boxers by surprise, but that embarrassing emotion appeared to have no place in Bugg's philosophy. With the swiftness of light he stepped to one side, and just as the human battering ram in front of him hurled itself forward, he brought up his right hand in a whizzing upper cut that caught his adversary under the angle of the jaw. The blow was so perfectly timed and delivered with such tremendous force that it lifted Lopez clean off his feet. With his arms flung out wide each side of him he made a sort of convulsive jerk into the air, and then crashed over backwards on to the floor, where he lay a huddled and inert mass.

For an instant the whole house remained hushed in a stupefied silence. Then as the time-keeper began to count off the fateful seconds a sudden hoarse roar broke out all over the building. Above the din could be heard the voices of Lopez' seconds, howling abuse and entreaty at their unconscious principal. In vain the referee waved his arms, entreating some sort of order for the count.

"Doggy" Donaldson clutched Tony by the wrist. "Damn it!" he shouted excitedly, "I believe he's broken his neck."

Even as he spoke came the clang of the time-keeper's gong, signifying that the ten seconds had passed. In a moment half a dozen figures were swarming over the ropes, but before any one of them

could reach him, Bugg had picked up his limp, unconscious adversary in his arms, and was carrying him across the ring to his own corner. He seemed to be by far the coolest and most collected person present.

Almost immediately Tony became the centre of a number of friends and acquaintances who were wringing his hand and congratulating him on the victory. After a minute or two he managed to free himself, and pushing his way through to the ring-side, inquired anxiously after the health of the unfortunate Lopez. "Doggy" Donaldson, who was amongst the crowd surrounding that fallen warrior, bent down with an air of considerable relief upon his honest countenance.

"It's all right," he said, "the beggar's coming round. I really thought for a moment he was a goner though. Gad, what a kick that boy of yours has got!"

"Well, I'm glad it's no worse," said Tony.

The other nodded. "Yes," he observed, "we must all be thankful for that. It would have been a rotten thing for the Club if he'd broken his neck."

He turned away, and following suit, Tony suddenly found himself face to face with the Marquis da Freitas, and his royal master, who had apparently stepped forward in order to learn the news. The Marquis appeared as suave as ever, but anything more sulky looking than His Majesty it would have been difficult to imagine.

Da Freitas bowed with the faintest ironical

exaggeration. "Permit me to congratulate you, Sir Antony. Your victory is indeed crushing."

Tony regarded him with his usual amiable smile. "Thanks," he said. "I am awfully glad your man isn't seriously hurt. It was bad luck his running into a punch like that." He turned to Pedro. "You can have a return match you know any time, if you care about it."

His Majesty scowled. "I will see him dead before I back him again," he observed bitterly.

The Marquis da Freitas showed his white teeth in a polite smile. "I fear you are rather too strong for us in the boxing-ring, Sir Antony. Perhaps some day we may find a more favourable battleground."

"I hope so," said Tony. "I rather like having a shade of odds against me. It's so much more interesting."

He nodded cheerfully to the pair of them, and moving off from the ring-side began to make his way across the hall. It was slow work, for friends kept on pulling him up with boisterous words of congratulation, while several of them made strenuous endeavours to persuade him to join a party at some neighbouring night club, to which they were going on for supper.

Tony, however, declined the invitation on the plea of a previous engagement. As he had told Guy at dinner it was his invariable custom after a successful fight to take Bugg out to Shepherd's, the celebrated oyster bar in Coventry Street—a resort much

frequented by gentlemen of pugilistic and sporting tastes. The simple-minded Tiger had not many weaknesses, but on these occasions it afforded him such extreme pleasure to be seen therewith his patron, that Tony wouldn't have missed gratifying him for the most festive supper party in London.

On reaching the dressing-room he found Bugg fully clothed and in the centre of a small levee of pressmen and fellow pugilists. McFarland, immensely in his element, was dispensing champagne to the visitors, and explaining how very lately his own unrivalled training methods had contributed to the result.

Tony stopped and chatted amiably for a few minutes until he could manage to extract Bugg from the centre of his admirers. When at last they succeeded in getting away they slipped out quietly by the side door of the Club in order to avoid the crowd who were still hanging about the front, and with a breath of relief found themselves in the cool night air of Long Acre.

Tony lit a cigarette and offered one to his companion.

"You positively surpassed yourself to-night, Bugg," he said. "The worst of it is that if you go on improving in this way, I shall have to find a new profession. No one will dare to bet against you."

"I 'ope I didn't shove it across 'im too sudden, sir?" inquired Bugg anxiously. "You said you was in a hurry."

"It was perfect," said Tony. "The only person who had any complaint to make was King Pedro."

Bugg sniffed contemptuously. "'E ain't much of a king, sir. I don't wonder they give 'im the chuck. A real king wouldn't taike on abaht droppin' a few quids."

"I daresay you're right," said Tony. "A certain recklessness in finance——"

He suddenly pulled up and for a moment remained where he was, staring across the street. On the opposite pavement, in the bright circle of light thrown by one of the big electric standards, he had caught sight of the figure of a girl, who at that distance reminded him curiously of Molly Monk. She had apparently just come out of the entrance to some flats above, and with a bag in her hand she was standing there in an uncertain, indefinite sort of way, as though she scarcely knew what to do next.

Realizing that it couldn't be Molly, who was of course at the theatre, Tony was just about to move on again, when something checked him.

Two well-dressed men in dark overcoats and soft hats had suddenly appeared out of the shadow ahead and advanced quickly to where the girl was standing. For an instant they all three remained facing each other under the light, and then taking off his hat, one of them addressed her.

With a little frightened gesture the girl shrank back against the wall, where she glanced wildly round as though seeking for some means of escape. The man who had spoken followed her forward, his

hat still in his hand, apparently making an effort to reassure her.

Tony turned to Bugg. "We really can't allow this sort of thing in Long Acre," he observed. "It has always been a most respectable street."

He threw away his cigarette, and followed by the future champion of England started off briskly across the road.

On hearing their footsteps the two men spun round with some abruptness. They were both obviously foreigners, and the sight of their sallow faces and black moustaches filled Tony with a pleasant sense of patriotic morality.

Without paying any attention to either of them he walked straight up to the girl, and taking off his hat made her a slight bow.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but from the other side of the road it looked as if these gentlemen were annoying you. Can I be of any assistance?"

She gazed up at him with grateful eyes. At close quarters her resemblance to Molly, though still remarkable, was not quite so convincing. She was a little younger and slighter, and there was a delicate air of distinction about her that was entirely her own.

"Oh, if you would be so kind," she said in a delightfully soft voice. "I do not wish to speak with these men. If you could send them away—right away——"

"Why, of course," replied Tony with his most cheerful smile, "please don't distress yourself."

He turned to the two sallow-faced strangers who seemed to have been utterly disconcerted by his sudden appearance on the scene.

“Go away,” he said, “and hurry up about it.”

CHAPTER IV

LIKE A FAIRY STORY

THERE was a short pause, and then the shorter of the two men stepped forward. He was an aggressive looking person with a cast in his eye, and he spoke with a slight foreign accent.

"Sir," he said, "you are making a mistake. We do not intend any insult to this lady. We are indeed her best friends. If you will be good enough to withdraw——"

With the gleam of battle in his eye, Bugg ranged up alongside the speaker, and tapped him on the elbow.

"'Ere!" he observed. "You 'eard wot the guv'nor said, didn't you?" He jerked his thumb over his left shoulder. "'Op it before you get 'urt."

Tony turned to the girl. "You mustn't be mixed up in a street fight," he said. "If you will allow me to see you to a taxi, my friend here will prevent these unpleasant looking people from following us."

He offered her his arm, and after a second's hesitation she laid a small gloved hand upon his sleeve.

"It is very kind of you," she faltered. "I fear I am going to give you a great deal of trouble."

"Not a bit," replied Tony. "I love interfering in other people's affairs."

With a swift stride the cross-eyed gentleman thrust himself across their path.

"No, no!" he exclaimed vehemently. "You must not listen to this man. You——"

With a powerful thrust of his disengaged arm Tony sent him staggering back to the edge of the pavement, where he stumbled over the curb and sat down heavily in the gutter.

His companion, seeing his fall, gave a guttural cry of anger and lifting the light stick that he was carrying lashed out savagely at Bugg. As coolly as if he were in the ring the latter ducked under the blow, and coming up with a beautiful straight left knocked his assailant spinning against the lamp-post.

Tony turned again to the girl at his side. "I am afraid we must tear ourselves away," he remarked. "We shall have half London here in a moment."

Already from down the street came the shrill blast of a whistle, followed a moment later by the sound of running footsteps. Heedless of these warnings the two strangers, now apparently reckless with fury, were collecting themselves for a fresh attack.

"Keep them busy, Bugg," said Tony quietly; and the next instant he and the girl were hurrying along the pavement in the direction of Martin's Lane. That fairly prosperous thoroughfare was only a few yards' distant, but before they could reach it the sounds of a magnificent tumult broke out again

behind them. The girl glanced nervously over her shoulder, and her grip on Tony's arm tightened.

"Oh!" she gasped, "oughtn't we to go back? Your friend will be hurt!"

Tony laughed reassuringly. "If any one's hurt," he observed, "it's much more likely to be one of the other gentlemen."

They rounded the corner, and as they did so a disengaged taxi came bowling opportunely up the street. Tony signalled to the driver to stop.

"Here we are!" he said.

A look of frightened dismay leaped suddenly into his companion's pretty face.

"What's the matter?" asked Tony.

"I—I forgot," she stammered. "I can't take a taxi. I—I haven't any money with me."

There was a moment's pause, while the driver bent forward from his box listening with interest to the spirited echoes from Long Acre.

"That's all right," remarked Tony. "We will talk about it in the cab." He turned to the driver. "Take us to Verrier's," he said. It was the first place that happened to come into his head.

The man jerked his head in the direction of the noise. "Bit of a scrap on from the sound of it, sir!" he observed.

Tony nodded. "Yes," he said regretfully, "it's a quarrelsome world."

He helped his companion into the taxi, and then following himself, shut the door. The vehicle started off with a jerk, and as it swung round the corner into

Coventry Street, its occupants were able to catch a momentary glimpse of the spot they had so recently quitted. It appeared to be filled by a small but animated crowd, in the centre of which a cluster of whirling figures was distinctly visible. Tony heard the girl beside him give a faint gasp of dismay.

"It's all right," he said. "Bugg's used to fighting. He likes it."

She looked up at him anxiously. "He is a soldier?" she asked, in that soft attractive voice of hers.

Tony suppressed a laugh just in time. "Something of the sort," he answered. Then with a pleasant feeling that the whole adventure was becoming rather interesting he added: "I say, I have told the man to drive us to Verrier's. I hope if you aren't in a hurry you will be charitable and join me in a little supper—will you? I'm simply starving."

By the light of a passing street lamp he suddenly caught sight of the troubled expression that had come into her eyes.

"Do just what you like, of course," he added quickly. "If you would rather I drove you straight home——"

"As a matter of fact," said the girl with a sort of desperate calmness. "I haven't a home to go to."

There was another brief pause. "Well, in that case," remarked Tony cheerfully, "there is no possible objection to our having a little supper—is there?"

For a moment she stared out of the window without replying. It was plain that she was the prey of

several contradictory emotions, of which a vague restless fear seemed to be the most prominent.

"I don't know what to do," she said unhappily. "You are very kind, but——"

"There is only one possible thing to do," interrupted Tony firmly, "and that is to come to Verrier's. We can discuss the next step when we get there."

Even as he spoke the taxi swerved across the road, and drew up in front of the famous underground restaurant.

Before getting out the girl threw a quick hunted glance from side to side of the street. "Do you think either of those men have followed us?" she whispered.

Tony shook his head comfortingly. "From what I know of Bugg," he said, "I should regard it as highly improbable."

He settled up with the driver, and then strolling across the pavement, rejoined the girl, who was waiting for him just outside the entrance. She had evidently made a great effort to recover her self-composure, for she looked up at him with a brave if slightly forced smile.

"I must make myself tidy," she said, "if you won't mind waiting a minute. I am simply not fit to be seen."

The statement appeared to be exaggerated to Tony, but he allowed it to pass unchallenged.

"Please don't hurry," he said. "I want to use the telephone, and if I finish first I can brood over what we'll have for supper."

She smiled again—this time more naturally, and taking the dressing-bag that he had been carrying for her, disappeared into the cloak-room. Tony abandoned his hat and coat to a waiter, and then sauntering forward, entered the restaurant.

The moment he appeared the manager, who was standing on the other side of the room, hastened across to greet him.

“Bon soir, Sir Antony,” he observed with that dazzling smile of welcome that managers only produce for their most wealthy customers. “May I ‘ave ze pleasiare of finding you a table.”

Tony nodded indulgently. “You may, Gustave,” he said: “A table for two with flowers on it, and as far away from the band as possible.” He paused. “Also,” he added, “I want a really nice little supper. Something with imagination about it. The sort of supper that you would offer to an angel if you unexpectedly found one with an appetite.”

The manager bowed with a gesture of perfect comprehension.

“And while you are wrestling with the problem,” said Tony, “I should like to use the telephone if I may.”

He was shown into the private office, where, in response to polite and repeated requests, a lady at the Exchange eventually found leisure to connect him with Shepherd’s Oyster Bar.

“Is Mr. ‘Tiger’ Bugg there?” he inquired.

The man who had answered the call departed to have a look round, and then returned with the

information that so far Mr. Bugg had not put in an appearance.

"Well, if he does come," said Tony, "will you tell him for me—Sir Antony Conway—that I shall not be able to join him. He can pick up the car at the R.A.C."

The man promised to deliver the message, and ringing off, Tony strolled back through the restaurant to the place where he had parted from his charming if slightly mysterious companion. He met her just coming out of the cloak-room.

"Oh, I hope I haven't kept you very long," she said penitently.

Tony looked down into the clear amber eyes that were turned up to his own, and thought that she was even prettier than he had at first imagined.

"I have only just this moment finished telephoning," he said. "The Central Exchange are like the gods. They never hurry."

She laughed softly, and then, as the waiter on duty opened the door with a low bow, they walked forward into the restaurant.

M. Gustave, more affable than ever, came up to conduct them to their table.

At the sight of the charming arrangement in maidenhair and narcissi which decorated the centre, the girl gave a little exclamation of pleasure.

"But how beautiful!" she said. "I never knew English restaurants——"

She stopped short as though she suddenly thought the remark were better unfinished.

Tony took no notice of her slight embarrassment. "I am glad you like flowers," he said. "It's such a nice primitive, healthy taste. Since Mr. Chamberlain died I believe I am the only person in London who still wears a button-hole."

They sat down on opposite sides of the table, and for the first time he was able to enjoy a complete and leisurely survey of his companion.

She was younger than he had thought at first—a mere girl of seventeen or eighteen—with the complexion of a wild rose, and the lithe, slender figure of a forest dryad. It was her red hair and the little firm, delicately moulded chin which gave her that curious superficial resemblance to Molly which had originally attracted his attention. He saw now that there were several differences between them—one of the most noticeable being the colour of their eyes. Molly's were blue—blue as the sky, while this girl's were of clear deep amber, like the water of some still pool in the middle of a moorland stream.

What charmed him most of all, however, was the faint air of sensitive pride that hung about her like some fragrant perfume. Although obviously frightened and apparently in a very awkward predicament, she was yet facing the situation with nervous thoroughbred courage that filled Tony with admiration.

One thing struck him as rather incongruous. She had said she had no money, and yet even to his masculine eyes it was quite clear that the clothes she was wearing, though simple in appearance, could only

have been made by a most expensive dressmaker. On the little finger of her left hand he also noticed a sapphire and diamond ring which if real must be of considerable value. All this combined to fill him with an agreeable and stimulating curiosity.

"I hope you are feeling none the worse for our wild adventures," he said, as the waiter withdrew, after handing them the first course.

She shook her head. "You have been extraordinarily kind," she said in a low voice. "I have a great deal to thank you for. I—I hardly know how to begin."

"Well, suppose we begin by introducing ourselves," he suggested cheerfully. "My name is Conway—Sir Antony Conway. My more intimate friends are occasionally permitted to call me Tony."

She hesitated a second before replying. "My name is Isabel," she said. "Isabel Francis," she added a little lamely.

"I shall call you 'Isabel' if I may," said Tony. "'Miss Francis' sounds so unromantic after the thrilling way in which we became friends."

He paused until the waiter, who had bustled up again with a bottle of champagne had filled their respective glasses and retired.

"And as we have become friends," he continued, "don't you think you can tell me how you have managed to get yourself into this—what shall we call it—scrape? I am not asking just out of mere curiosity. I should like to help you if I can. You

see I am always in scrapes myself, so I might be able to give you some good advice."

The gleam of fun in his eyes, and the friendly way in which he spoke, seemed to take away much of his companion's nervousness. She sipped her champagne, looking at him over the top of the glass with a simple, almost childish gratitude.

"You *have* been kind and nice," she said frankly. "I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't been there." She put down her glass. "You see," she went on in a slower and more hesitating way, "I—I came up to London this evening to stay with an old governess of mine who has a flat in Long Acre. When I got there I found she had gone away, and then I didn't know what to do, because I hadn't brought any money with me."

"Wasn't she expecting you?" asked Tony.

Miss "Isabel Francis" shook her head. "No-o," she admitted. "You see I hadn't time to write and tell her I was coming." She paused. "I—I left home rather in a hurry," she added naïvely.

Tony leaned back in his chair and looked at her with a smile. He was enjoying himself immensely.

"And our two yellow-faced friends in evening-dress," he asked. "Were they really old acquaintances of yours?"

The frightened, hunted look flashed back into her eyes. "No, no," she said quickly. "I had never seen them before in my life. I had just left the flats when they came up and spoke to me. They were both strangers—quite absolutely strangers."



Tony sent the fellow staggering back to the edge of the pavement. His companion lashed out savagely at Bugg. The latter ducked under the blow, and coming up with a beautiful straight left, knocked his assailant spinning.

Tony turned again to the girl. "I am afraid we must tear ourselves away," he remarked. "We shall have half London here in a moment."

She spoke eagerly, as though specially anxious that her words should carry conviction, but somehow or other Tony felt a little sceptical. He couldn't forget the fierce persistence of the two men, which seemed quite out of keeping with the idea that they had been interrupted in a mere piece of wanton impertinence. Besides, if what she said about them were true it would hardly account for her unreasoning terror that they might have followed her to the restaurant. Being polite by nature, however, he was careful to show no sign of doubting her statement.

He allowed the waiter to help them both to some attractive looking mystery in aspic, and then, when they were again alone, he leaned forward and observed with sympathy:

"Well, I'm glad we happened to roll up at the right time. It's always jolly to give that sort of gentlemen a lesson in manners." He paused. "Have you made any kind of plans about what you are going to do next?"

She shook her head. "I—I haven't quite decided," she said. "I suppose I must find some place to stay at until Miss Watson comes back."

"How long will that be?"

"I don't know. You see she has just gone away and shut up the flat, and left no address."

"Haven't you any other friends in London?"

She shook her head again. "Nobody," she said, "at least nobody who could help me." Then she hesitated. "I have lived in Paris nearly all my life," she added by way of explanation.

There was a brief silence.

"If you will forgive my mentioning such a sordid topic," remarked Tony pleasantly, "what do you propose to do about money?"

"I can get some money to-morrow," she answered. "I can sell some jewellery—this ring for instance—and there are other things in my bag."

"And to-night?"

She glanced round rather desperately. "I don't know. I must go somewhere. I was thinking that perhaps I could sit in one of the churches—or there might be a convent—" She broke off with a little glance, as if appealing to Tony for his advice.

"Why not go to a hotel?" he suggested. "If you will allow me, I will lend you some money, and you can pay me back when it's convenient."

She flushed slightly. "Oh!" she stammered, "you are so kind. Perhaps if I could find some quite quiet place—" She stopped again, but looking at her, Tony could see the old hunted expression still lurking in her eyes. Somehow he felt certain that she was thinking about the two strangers.

A sudden brilliant idea suggested itself to him. "Look here!" he exclaimed. "How would this do? My butler's wife—Mrs. Spalding—has got a small house just off Heath Street, Hampstead. I know she lets rooms and I am pretty nearly sure that just at present there is no one there. Why shouldn't we run up in the car and have a look at the place? She could fix you up for the night anyway, and if you

find you like it you can stay on there till your Miss—Miss Thingumbob comes back.”

A naturally distrustful nature was evidently not one of Isabel’s characteristics, for she received the proposal with the most frank and genuine gratitude.

“Oh!” she cried, “that would be nice! But won’t she be asleep by now?”

“It doesn’t matter if she is,” said Tony tranquilly. “We will pick up Spalding on the way and take him round with us to rout her out. If she feels peevish at being waked up, she can let the steam off on him first.”

He beckoned to the waiter and asked that accomplished henchman to ring up the R.A.C. and instruct Jennings to bring the car round to Verrier’s.

“And find out,” he added, “whether ‘Tiger Bugg’ has turned up there or not.”

The waiter departed on his mission, coming back in a few minutes with the information that the car would be round at once, and that so far Mr. ‘Tiger’ Bugg had neither been seen nor heard of.

“I wonder where he can be,” said Tony to his companion. “He can’t possibly have taken all this time to slaughter a couple of dagoes. I am afraid the police must have interfered.”

The suggestion seemed to fill Isabel with a certain amount of dismay.

“The police!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands. “Oh, but I hope not. He is so brave he would have fought with them, and perhaps they may have killed him.”

The picture of a desperately resisting Bugg being hacked to pieces on the pavement by infuriated bobbies appealed hugely to Tony's sense of humour.

"I don't think it's likely," he said in a reassuring tone. "The English police as a whole are very good-natured. They seldom take life except in self-defence."

He added one or two other items of information with regard to Bugg's hardihood and fertility of resource, which seemed to comfort Isabel, and then, with the latter's permission, he lighted a cigarette and called for his bill.

He was just settling it when news came that the car had arrived. He instructed the waiter to place Isabel's bag inside, and then bidding good-night to the bowing and valedictory M. Gustave, they walked upstairs to the entrance.

They found the big gleaming Rolls-Royce drawn up by the curb with Jennings standing in a joyless attitude at the door. When his glance fell on Isabel he looked more pessimistic than ever.

"Any news of Bugg?" inquired Tony.

The chauffeur shook his head. "Not a word, sir."

"I left a message at Shepherd's that he was to come and pick you up at the Club. I wonder what's happened to him."

For a moment Jennings brooded darkly over the problem. "Perhaps he got some internal injury in the fight and was took sudden with it in the street,"

he suggested. "I could run round the 'orspitals and make inquiries if you wished, sir?"

"Thank you, Jennings," said Tony. "You are very helpful; but I think I should prefer to go back to Hampstead."

"Just as you please, sir," observed Jennings indifferently.

He closed the door after them, and then mounting the driving-seat, started off along Piccadilly.

Isabel, who had again cast a quick glance out of each window, turned to Tony with a smile.

"He doesn't seem a very cheerful man, your chauffeur," she said. "He has got such a sad voice."

Tony nodded. "That's the reason I originally engaged him. I like to have a few miserable people about the place: they help me to realize how happy I am myself."

Isabel laughed merrily. The solution of her difficulties in the way of a lodging seemed to have taken an immense weight off her spirits, and in the agreeably shaded light of the big limousine she looked younger and prettier than ever. So far his new adventure struck Tony as being quite the most interesting and promising he had ever embarked on.

As the car glided on through the depressing architecture of Camden Town he began to tell her in a cheerful inconsequent sort of fashion something about his house and general surroundings. She listened with the utmost interest, the whole thing evidently striking her as being highly novel and entertaining.

"And do you live quite by yourself?" she asked.

"Quite," said Tony. "Except for Spalding and Jennings and Bugg and a cook and two or three maid-servants and dear old Guy!"

"Who's Guy?" she demanded.

"Guy," he said, "can be best described as being Guy. In addition to that he is also my cousin and my secretary."

"Your secretary?" she repeated. "Why, what does he do?"

"His chief occupation is doing my tenants," said Tony. "In his spare time he gives me good advice which I never follow. You must come to breakfast to-morrow and make his acquaintance."

The car turned in at the drive gates of "Goodman's Rest," which was the felicitous name that Tony had selected for his house, and drew up outside the front entrance.

"I will just see if Spalding has gone to bed," he said to Isabel. "If not it's hardly worth while your getting out."

He opened the door with his key and entering the hall, which was lighted softly by concealed electric lamps, pressed a bell alongside the fireplace. Almost immediately a door swung open at the back and Spalding appeared on the threshold.

"Good," said Tony, "I thought you might have turned in."

"I was about to do so, Sir Antony," replied Spalding impassively. "May I mention how pleased we all were at the news of Bugg's success."

"Oh, you have heard about it!" remarked Tony.
"Is Bugg back then?"

"No, sir. I took the liberty of ringing up the Cosmopolitan. The Cook had a half-crown on, sir, and she was almost painfully anxious to ascertain the result."

Tony nodded his approval. "After the way she grilled that sole to-night," he said, "I would deny her nothing." He paused. "Spalding," he added: "are you frightened of your wife?"

"No, sir," replied Spalding. "At least not more than most husbands, sir."

"Well, I want you to come and act as my ambassador. There is a young lady in the motor outside who is in need of somewhere to sleep and some kind and sensible person to look after her. I know Mrs. Spalding lets rooms, and although it's rather a queer time of night to receive a new lodger, I thought that if you came and put the case to her tactfully, she might stretch a point to oblige me."

Spalding's face remained beautifully expressionless. "I am sure my wife would do anything to oblige you, sir," he observed. "If you will excuse my saying so, you stand very high in her good opinion, sir."

"Indeed!" said Tony. "I am afraid you must be an extraordinarily deceitful husband, Spalding."

The butler bowed. "I make a point, sir, of only repeating incidents which seem to me likely to appeal to her."

"A very excellent habit," said Tony gravely.

"Get on your hat and coat, and we will see how it works out in practice."

A few minutes later, with Spalding sitting on the front seat alongside of Jennings, they were retracing their way across the Heath. On reaching the main thoroughfare they turned up one of the little steep streets that run off to the right, and came to a halt in front of an old-fashioned row of small white houses, standing back behind narrow slips of garden.

Spalding opened the gate for them, and then leading the way up the path, let them in at the front door with a latch-key. A feeble flicker of gas was burning in the hall.

"If you will wait in here, sir," he observed, opening a door on the right, "I will go upstairs and acquaint my wife with your arrival."

The room he showed them into, though small in size and simply furnished, was a remarkably pleasant little apartment. In the first place, everything was scrupulously clean, and the general impression of cheerful freshness was heightened by a couple of bowls of hyacinths in full bloom which stood on a table in the window.

"How does this appeal to the taste of Isabel?" inquired Tony, lighting himself another cigarette.

"Why it's charming!" she exclaimed. "I shall be so happy if I can stay here. It all seems so free and lovely after—" she checked herself—"after where I have been living," she finished.

"Well, I hope it will all be up to sample," said Tony, "I can't imagine Spalding being content with

anything second rate—at least judging by his taste in wine and cigars.” He paused. “What time would you like breakfast in the morning?”

“Breakfast?” she repeated.

“I always call it breakfast,” explained Tony. “It is such a much healthier sounding word than lunch. Suppose I send the car round for you about eleven? Would that be too early?”

She shook her head, smiling. “I expect I could manage it,” she said. “You see I generally get up at eight o’clock.”

“We could have it a little earlier if you like,” remarked Tony unselfishly.

“Oh, no,” she answered. “I shall probably enjoy lying in bed to-morrow.” Then with a little laugh she added: “But surely I can walk round. It’s quite a short distance isn’t it, and all across the nice Heath?”

“Just as you like,” said Tony. “I shall send the car any way. The morning air is so good for Jennings.”

As he spoke there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and a moment later Spalding re-entered the room.

“My wife asks me to say, sir, that she will be very pleased to make the young lady as comfortable as possible. She is coming downstairs herself as soon as we have withdrawn. Owing to the lateness of the hour she is slightly—h’m—*en déshabillé*.”

“We will retire in good order,” said Tony gravely.

Then as Spalding tactfully left the room he turned to Isabel.

"Good-night, Isabel," he said. "Sleep peacefully, and don't dream that you are being chased by yellow-faced strangers."

She gave him her little slim cool hand, and he raised it lightly to his lips.

"Good-night," she answered, "and thank you, thank you again so much." Then she paused. "It's just like a fairy story, isn't it?" she added.

"Just," said Tony with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER V

THE LENIENCY OF JUSTICE

As the clock above the mantelpiece struck eleven, Guy Oliver wiped his pen and laid it carefully down in front of him. He was sitting at a roll-top desk in his office—a room of severely business-like aspect, chiefly furnished with maps and filing cabinets.

With that systematic deliberation that marked all his movements he extracted a document from the pigeon-hole in front of him and rising to his feet walked across to the door. In the passage outside a neatly dressed housemaid was engaged in the task of polishing the banisters.

“Do you know if Sir Antony is up yet, Mary?” he inquired.

“He has been up some little time, sir,” answered the girl. “I believe you will find him in the study. I heard him telling Mr. Spalding to lay breakfast in there, instead of in the dining-room.”

With a look of mild surprise upon his face, Guy pursued his way downstairs. He crossed the hall, and opening the door of the study remained for a moment on the threshold, contemplating the scene in front of him.

A black oak gate-legged table, gleaming with flowers, fruit, and silver, stood out attractively in the centre of the room, while the spring sunshine, streaming in through the open French window, bathed everything in its warm, inspiring rays. Tony himself looking delightfully cool and serene in a perfectly cut grey morning suit, was lounging on the broad window-seat gazing out into the garden.

He turned round at Guy's entrance.

"Hullo, old chap!" he observed pleasantly: "just out of bed?"

Guy took no notice of this irreverent question. He advanced to the table, and adjusting his pince-nez, carefully inspected its contents.

"If you will forgive my saying so, Tony," he remarked, "you are becoming shamelessly greedy. Where on earth did you get these peaches and hot-house grapes from?"

"I sent Jennings into Harrod's for them," answered Tony. "A little morning exercise is good for him, and I have a friend coming to breakfast."

"Oh!" said Guy. "Any one I know?"

Tony shook his head. "I don't think so. In fact we only became acquainted ourselves last night."

"One of your curious sporting acquaintances, I suppose?" observed Guy with a faint touch of disapproval.

Tony smiled pensively. "Yes," he said, "on the whole I think we may pass the description. If you will wait and have breakfast with us I shall be charmed to introduce you."

"Thanks very much," said Guy, "but I had my breakfast a couple of hours ago. Besides I am rather busy this morning." He produced the paper which he had brought down from the office. "I wanted to catch you before you went out, to get you to sign this. It's the agreement with Marshall I spoke to you about on Thursday. You had better look it through."

Tony pulled a fountain pen out of his inside pocket. "My dear Guy!" he said. "I should never dream of reading a document that you had passed as accurate. It would be a reflection on your sobriety."

He scribbled his name in the appointed place and handed the paper back to his cousin.

"I see in the *Daily Mail* this morning that Bugg won his fight all right," remarked the latter. "What time did you get back?"

"I got back at a most respectable hour," said Tony. "I am sorry to say I managed to lose Bugg."

"Lose him!" echoed Guy.

"Yes," said Tony. "You know how careless I am. I——"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in," he called out.

The door opened and Spalding advanced with dignity across the threshold.

"Miss Francis," he announced.

There was a moment's pause and then, looking slightly embarrassed but most refreshingly beautiful, Isabel appeared in the doorway.

Tony who had jumped to his feet came forward and took her hand.

"Good-morning, Isabel," he said. "How wonderfully punctual you are! You must have been very well brought up."

She shook her head, smiling shyly. "I am afraid it is only because I am hungry," she said. "As a rule I am late for everything."

"We ought to get along together famously," replied Tony. "Let's see, you don't know Guy yet, do you? Guy, let me introduce you to Isabel. I have already acquainted her with some of your better and brighter qualities."

Guy, whose face was an interesting study in blended emotions, made a little stiff bow.

"I have been trying to persuade him to stay and have breakfast with us," proceeded Tony mischievously, "but he says he doesn't care about my curious sporting friends."

With a spasmodic gesture Guy took a step forward. "Really I—I protest," he stammered. "You mustn't listen to him, Miss Francis. It is a gross misrepresentation."

"I am quite sure you wouldn't say anything disagreeable, Mr.—Mr. Guy," replied Isabel consolingly. "You have much too kind a face."

Guy crimsoned vividly, and with a gentle chuckle Tony relieved Isabel of her coat.

"Don't you be deceived," he said. "You should hear the brutal way he addresses my tenants when they want something done to their houses."

"Oh, do shut up, Tony," remonstrated Guy.

"Aren't you really going to stay to breakfast?" asked Isabel, inspecting the table. "There seems to be such a lot for two."

"I—I am afraid I can't," said Guy with some embarrassment. "I should be delighted to, but—I have some work I must get done." He turned to Tony. "By the way, there was a note from Henry this morning saying that if you were going to be at home to-night he would like to come to dinner. He wants me to ring him up and let him know."

"I suppose we may as well get it over," said Tony sadly. "If I say no he will only want me to dine at Rutland Gate, and that would be worse still. The last time I went I was put next to a woman who ate nothing but beans and drank hot water and lemon. It made me feel quite faint."

"Very well," said Guy. "I will tell him to come along at eight. Don't go out and forget all about it."

He made another stiff little bow to Isabel, and walking across to the door, took his departure.

"That's Guy," said Tony. "What do you think of him?"

"I think he's rather nice," said Isabel thoughtfully. "He is just a wee bit serious, of course, but then you want that in a secretary, don't you?"

Tony nodded. "Guy is wonderful," he began. "Since he came to live with me——"

He was interrupted by the reappearance of Spalding, who entered the room carrying a tray full of

silver dishes which sent up various appetizing odours into the morning air.

Isabel contemplated the feast with frank interest.

"What a good breakfast!" she observed. "Do you always have a breakfast like this?"

"Always," replied Tony firmly. "I find my constitution requires it."

He walked across to the sideboard, where Spalding had set out the dishes, and lifting up their covers in turn announced the results to Isabel.

She selected mushroom omelette as a starting point, and after helping himself lightly to the same delicacy, Tony sat down alongside of her at the gate-legged table.

"Well," he said, "and what's the report? Has Mrs. Spalding made you comfortable?"

Isabel nodded gratefully. "Yes," she said; "she has been so pleasant and kind. She didn't seem to mind in the least my coming in like that in the middle of the night, and this morning she had a cup of tea and a lovely hot bath all ready for me when I woke up." She paused. "I don't know what I should have done last night if it hadn't been for you," she added with a sudden slight return to her former shyness.

"Oh, you would have been all right," said Tony cheerfully. "Somebody else would have come along and knocked those interfering gentlemen down for you. London is full of obliging strangers. We just had the good luck to be the first—that was all."

"It was not all," returned Isabel with spirit.

"There was the supper, and finding me somewhere to go to, and asking me to breakfast this morning, and—and—oh, being so nice about everything." She hesitated. "Your friend—the one who fought for us so bravely—I hope he was not hurt?"

Tony shook his head. "You couldn't hurt Bugg," he said, "except with a pickaxe."

"I hope you told him how grateful I was to him," she added.

"I haven't had the chance yet," replied Tony. "He hasn't come home."

A sudden look of concern flashed into Isabel's amber eyes. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "perhaps he is hurt after all. Perhaps he is in a hospital!"

"I should think it much more likely that he's in a police station," observed Tony. "I can't think why he hasn't rung up though, unless it's because he is anxious to keep my name out of it. For a prize-fighter Bugg has the most wonderfully delicate feelings."

"A prize-fighter!" echoed Isabel. "Is he a prize-fighter like—like—like Carpentier?"

"Something like him," said Tony; "especially the way he covers up." He paused. "Bugg is really quite a famous person in his way you know. He is practically the welter-weight champion of England. He only stays on here and works for me because it amuses him. I meant to explain last night, but there were so many other things to talk about."

"I see," said Isabel slowly. "And you were just walking together?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, Bugg had been boxing at the Cosmopolitan Club. It was over rather earlier than we expected, and I was taking him along to give him some supper. That's how we happened to be in Long Acre."

Isabel nodded. "I understand. It is all plain now. Last night I was frightened and everything seemed so confused."

"I don't wonder at it," said Tony sympathetically. "Unless one's led a very strenuous life it must be horribly confusing to be suddenly held up by a couple of dagoes in Long Acre, and then rescued by a future champion of England."

There was a long pause.

"I—I feel somehow that I ought to explain," began Isabel uncomfortably. "You have been so nice about not asking any questions, but of course you must be wondering who I am, and—and how things came to be like this."

"Only mildly and pleasantly," said Tony. "I never allow my curiosity to get painful."

Isabel set down her cup. "I would tell you if I could," she said rather desperately, "but there are reasons why I mustn't."

Tony's face brightened at once. "How nice!" he observed. "I love mystery, and so few people have any of it about them nowadays—especially in Hampstead."

"I hate it," exclaimed Isabel with what seemed unnecessary bitterness: "I have had nothing else but mystery and secrets all my life. Oh, if you only

knew how lovely it was just to be oneself for once—to be able to do and say exactly what one likes—” She paused and took a long, deep breath. “I can’t go back again,” she added. “I—I believe I should kill myself if I did.”

“Of course you can’t go back,” said Tony. “We settled all that last night. You are going to stay on with Mrs. Spalding and adopt me and Guy as cousins. I don’t think there is any need to let Henry in just at present. One would want a bit of practice before adopting Henry.”

Isabel looked across at him with that frank, almost childish smile of hers, which contrasted so delightfully with the little touch of dignity in her manner.

“I should love to have some nice relations,” she said. “All mine are perfectly horrid.”

“And all mine,” observed Tony, “are horribly perfect. I don’t know which is the more trying of the two.”

There was a moment’s pause, and then, as if a sudden thought had struck her, Isabel reached across to the adjoining chair, and unhooked the little silver chain-bag which she had brought in with her.

“Oh,” she said, “before I forget I wanted to ask you if you would be so kind as to do something for me. I hate bothering you, but you see I don’t know any one else, and I’m so ignorant about this kind of thing.” She took out a couple of rings and a brooch and pushed them across the table. “It’s to sell them,” she added. “I—I think they ought to be worth something.”

Tony picked up the brooch. It was a beautiful piece of work—a large single and absolutely flawless emerald, delicately set in gold. Without being an expert in such matters he knew enough of precious stones to realize that it was of considerable value.

“I should think this would do to begin with,” he said, “unless you are going to be very extravagant. It ought to bring in bread and butter for the rest of your life-time.”

Isabel’s face lighted up. “Will it really!” she exclaimed. “How lovely. I never thought it would be worth as much as that!”

Tony turned his attention to the rings, which in their way were every bit as good as the brooch. One was the half-hoop of sapphires and diamonds which he had noticed on the previous evening, the other consisted of three very fine rubies, mounted in a curious, old-fashioned setting that seemed to be of Eastern origin.

He examined them both with much interest and then handed them back to Isabel.

“You must keep them,” he said. “They are much too beautiful to sell, and besides, there is no need to sell them. The brooch will bring you in quite a lot of money, and you can always get credit from the milkman as long as you wear rubies and diamonds.”

Isabel smiled, and slipping on the two rings held them out for Tony’s inspection.

“I am so glad,” she said happily. “I should hate to have sold them really. You see they belonged—”

She again came to an abrupt and rather confused halt. "They belonged to my great-grandmother," she finished weakly.

"Indeed," said Tony in a perfectly grave voice. "She must have had charming hands."

There was a light tap at the door, and after a moment's delay the discreet figure of Spalding again appeared on the threshold.

"I beg pardon, Sir Antony," he observed, "but Bugg has just returned. I thought you might wish to be informed."

Tony pushed back his chair. "What has he been doing with himself?" he asked.

"I fancy, sir," returned Spalding impassively, "that he has been spending the night in the Bow Street police station."

"Oh!" exclaimed Isabel in a horrified voice.

"Really!" said Tony. "How exciting!" He turned to Isabel. "Shall we have him up?"

She nodded eagerly.

"Send him along, Spalding," continued Tony. "He needn't trouble about making himself beautiful. Tell him I should like to see him at once."

The butler withdrew, and a few moments later Bugg appeared in the doorway. He saluted Tony with a cheerful grin, and then, as he caught sight of Isabel, a sudden embarrassment seemed to descend upon his spirit. He coughed apologetically, lowered his eyes, and shuffled slightly with one foot.

"Good-morning, Bugg," said Tony. "Come and sit down."

Bugg advanced cautiously to the nearest chair and seated himself on the extreme edge.

"Mornin', sir," he observed. Then, throwing a nervous glance at Isabel, he added hoarsely! "Pleased to see yer, Miss."

"I am very pleased to see you," said Isabel a little shyly. "I want to thank you for what you did last night. I am so sorry they took you to prison."

Bugg stared hard at the carpet. "That's all right, Miss," he muttered. "Don't you worry abaht that, Miss."

Tony offered Isabel a cigarette, and then lit one himself.

"You were magnificent, Bugg," he said. "Tell us what happened after we left."

Bugg coughed again. "Well, sir, 'twas this wy, sir. Seein' as you and the young laidy was best aht of it, I jest keeps them two Daigoes busy like withaht puttin' 'em through it. It didn't seem to me as no one was goin' to taik the trouble to foller you when 'e could be standin' there watchin' a scrap fur nothin'."

"I hope you didn't get hurt," said Isabel, who, with a slightly bewildered expression, had been trying to follow this narrative.

Bugg shook his head. "Not me, Miss. It was jest a 'alf 'oliday fur me till they starts usin' their feet, and then I 'anded 'em a couple of flaps in the jaw quick, an' that steadied 'em. Not as I think they meant no 'arm, Miss. There's parts o' the world where they don't know no better.

"Yours is a generous heart, Bugg," said Tony. "What happened next?"

"The rozzers come then, sir—a pair of 'em, sir. They busts in through the crowd like tigers, and afore ye could wink, one of 'em grabs onter me, and the other cops 'old of the tall Daigo."

"And the second man—the one with the crooked eyes?" asked Isabel quickly. "What happened to him?"

"Well, I don't rightly know, Miss," said Bugg apologetically. "Yer see, 'e weren't there in a manner o' speakin'. 'E'd gorn across the street when I give 'im that shove in the jaw, an 'e 'adn't 'ad time to come back. I think the coppers missed 'im."

"But they stuck to you two all right?" said Tony.

Bugg nodded his head. "Yus, sir, we all goes orf to the staition together—me an' the cops an' the Daigo an' the 'ole bloomin' street arter us. It weren't 'alf a picnic, sir, I can tell yer. Well, w'en we gets to the staition, I sees the inspector—'im wot taikes the charge—lookin' partikler 'ard at me, but 'e don't say nothin', 'cept to ask me my naime and address.

"'Erbert Johnson of 'Igh Street, Keington,' says I. It was the fust thing as comes into my 'ead.

"'An' you?' says 'e, turnin' to the Daigo.

"'My naime is Smith,' says the Daigo in 'is funny foreign wy o' speakin'.

"'It's a good naime,' says the inspector, writin' it dahn. "'Wot's all this trouble abaht?"

“‘It was a misunderstandin’,’ says the Daigo very ’aughty like. ‘I declines to answer any further questions.’

“‘You got anything to sy, ’Erbert Johnson,’ says ’e to me. . .

“‘I agree with the gen’leman wot’s just spoke, sir,’ says I.

“‘Very well,’ says ’e. ‘This is a matter fur ’is Honour, this is. You’ll ’ave to stop ’ere the night, the pair of ye, unless ye’ve got some kind friends as’ll come along an’ bail yer aht.’

“‘E looks at us both, but the Daigo don’t sy nothin’ and I thinks to meself the more privit we keeps this ’ere little mixup the better fur all parties concerned. So I lays low too, an’ orf we goes to the cells, saime as a couple o’ ord’nary drunks and disorderlies.”

Bugg paused for a moment, and a reminiscent grin spread slowly across his face.

“It’s a good story,” said Tony encouragingly. “Go on with it.”

“Well, sir, I ’adn’t bin in the cell very long w’en the door opens and who should come in but the inspector ’isself. ’E looks me up an’ dahn with a kinder twinkle in ’is eye, an’ then ’e says, ‘’Erbert Johnson,’ ’e says, ‘w’y the ’ell didn’t yer dot ’im one o’ them left ’ooks o’ yours, and then we shouldn’t ’ave ’ad all this trouble?’ Well, that done it, sir! I twigs at once ’e’d spotted who I was, and seein’ ’e meant ter be friendly like I ups and tells ’im just exactly ’ow it ’ad all come abaht. ‘Don’t worry,’ says ’e ter me; ‘your blue-chinned pal don’t want a

fuss no more'n you do. 'E's jest bin bribin' and corruptin' o' me to run the caise through as a ord'nary street quarrel, an' seein' as we're told ter be kind to straingers, per'aps I might see my wy ter do it.' Then 'e puts 'is 'and on my shoulder. 'As fur you, 'Erbert Johnson,' 'e says, 'you gotter come along with me an' be introjooed to some o' the boys. We does a bit o' scrappin' 'ere in our spare time, an' 'tain't often we 'as the honour of entertaining a future champion of England.'

"With that, sir, 'e taikes me upstairs to the inspector's room, where there was 'alf a dozen cops sittin' arahnd smokin' and drinkin' saime as if it was a pub or a privit drorin' room. Talk o' sports, sir—w'y Gawd love us I might a bin the King of England the wy they treated me. 'Tell us abaht the fight, Tiger,' they says, and if 'you'd seen me sittin' there, sir, with a large Bass in one 'and and a four-penny stinker in the other and all them cops 'angin' on my words, ye'd 'ave laughed fit ter bust yerself, sir."

Tony nodded his head. "I have always suspected that the police led a double life," he said.

"They're all right, sir," explained Bugg earnestly, "on'y they got their livin' to get, saime as other folks. They treated me proper, they did. Gimme a 'addick fur breakfast next mornin', and w'en the caise comes on they 'as it all arrainged fur us right an' simple as anything. The copper as took us 'e tells 'is little bit, saime as wot 'e'd fixed up with the inspector, an' then the Beak—'ole Sir 'Orace Samuel it was—'e

puts on 'is glasses and blinks rahnd at the pair of us. 'Either o' the prisoners any observations to hoffer?' 'e says. 'E waits 'alf a tick, an' then as neither of us says nothin', 'e scratches 'is 'ead and grunts aht, 'seven-and-sixpence an' costs, an' 'urry up with the nex' caise.'"

Bugg stopped, and wiping his forehead with his coat sleeve looked from Tony to Isabel and then back again at his patron.

"An' that's abaht all, sir," he added. "We forks out the rhino, and then I gets a taxi-cab and tells the bloke to bung along 'ere as quick as 'e can shift." He hesitated for a moment. "I 'ope I done the right thing, sir?" he finished anxiously.

There was a long pause.

"You always do the right thing, Bugg," said Tony, at last. "It's almost a disease with you."

He pushed back his chair and for a little while remained gazing thoughtfully at the marmalade pot.

"Bugg," he said; "have you any special engagements the next few days?"

"Not as I knows on, sir," replied Tiger, innocently.

Tony nodded his head. "Good," he observed, and without further comment he renewed his contemplation of the breakfast table.

"There's the matter o' the stakes, sir," Bugg ventured to remind him. "'Alf-past twelve, sir, was the time Dr. Donaldson said they'd be payin' over."

Tony again nodded. "That will be all right, Bugg," he said. "I will go down to the Club myself and collect the royal booty. I only hope da Freitas

will turn up personally. It would give me great pleasure to watch him writing out the cheque."

He looked across smilingly towards Isabel, and saw to his amazement that she had suddenly gone as white as a sheet.

CHAPTER VI

PRICING AN HEIRLOOM

TONY was so surprised that for a moment he remained just as he was. Then suddenly recovering himself he turned back to Bugg.

"You had better go along and find yourself something to eat, 'Tiger,'" he said. "That haddock must be getting a little historical by now."

Bugg rose to his feet with a grin. "I *could* shift a bit, sir," he observed, "an' that ain't 'alf a fact."

"Tell the cook what you'd like," said Tony. "After last night she will do anything for you." He paused. "I want to see you again before I go out," he added.

Bugg touched his forehead, and after making a respectful obeisance to Isabel withdrew from the room. Tony followed him to the door, and then closing it after him, turned back leisurely towards the table. Though she still looked a little pale and upset, the interval had obviously done Isabel good.

"Is there anything the matter?" asked Tony kindly.

She shook her head, with a plucky if rather unsuccessful attempt at a smile. "No," she said, "I—I

didn't feel very well for a moment. It's nothing—absolutely nothing." She paused, her lower lip caught nervously between her small white teeth. "I don't think I ought to bother you any more," she added with a kind of forced calmness. "I think perhaps it would be best after all if I—if I found somewhere else to go to."

Tony made a gesture of dissent. "It can't be done," he said gravely. "You see you are my lodger now, and you have got to give me a full week's notice." Then with a sudden change he went on: "You mustn't be selfish you know, Isabel. You can't float into people's lives out of Long Acre with all sorts of delightful suggestions of romance and mystery about you, and then simply disappear again the next morning. It's not playing the game. I should feel like a man who had been turned out of a theatre at the end of the first act."

"You don't understand," said Isabel almost in a whisper.

"I know I don't," said Tony cheerfully. "That's what's so charming about it." He paused. "Suppose we have a week's trial at all events?" he suggested. "If it turns out a failure it will be just as easy for you to disappear then. You know both Guy and I improve on acquaintance—really. You mustn't judge us by what we are like at breakfast. We get much more bright and pleasant as the day wears on."

In spite of herself Isabel laughed. "It isn't that I don't want to stay," she said. "I—I like you both

very much." She hesitated and looked nervously round the room as if seeking for inspiration. "It's what might happen," she added. "I can't explain, but I might be the cause of getting you into trouble or—or even danger."

"That's all right," said Tony. "I like danger, and Guy simply adores trouble. He takes it with everything."

Isabel made a faint gesture of helplessness. "Oh," she said. "I can't go on arguing. You are so obstinate. But I *have* warned you, haven't I?"

Tony nodded. "If you like to call it a warning," he said. "I look on it more as a promise. If you knew how dull Hampstead was you would understand our morbid thirst for a little unhealthy excitement."

"I don't think I should find Hampstead dull," remarked Isabel a shade wistfully. "It seems to me just beautifully peaceful. I think I should like to live here for ever, and do exactly what I want to, and not be bothered about anything."

"But that's precisely what I am suggesting," observed Tony.

Isabel smiled again. She seemed to be recovering her spirits. "I should have to get some clothes first," she said. "I couldn't live here for ever on the contents of one small dressing-bag."

"It sounds inadequate," agreed Tony, "but I think that's a difficulty we might get over. I was just going to propose that you should take the car and Mrs. Spalding this afternoon, and go and do some shopping."

Isabel's eyes sparkled. "How lovely!" she exclaimed. Then a sudden cloud came over her face. "But I forgot," she added, "I haven't any money—not until you have sold the brooch for me."

"That doesn't matter," said Tony. "If you will let me, I will advance you fifty pounds, and you can pay me to-morrow when we settle up."

Isabel took a deep breath. "Oh, you *are* kind," she said. Then for a moment she paused, her forehead knitted as though some unpleasant thought had suddenly come into her mind.

"Anything wrong?" inquired Tony.

She looked round again with the same half-nervous, half-hunted expression he had seen before.

"I was thinking," she faltered. "Those two men. I wonder if there is any chance that I might meet them again. I—I know it's silly to be frightened, but somehow or other—" She broke off as if hardly knowing how to finish the sentence.

Tony leaned across the table and took her hand in his.

"Look here, Isabel," he said, "you have got to forget those ridiculous people. Whoever they are it is quite impossible for them to interfere with you again. We don't allow our adopted cousin to be frightened by anybody, let alone a couple of freaks out of a comic opera. I would have come shopping with you myself this afternoon if I hadn't promised to try out a new car at Brooklands. As it is I am going to send Bugg. He will sit in front with Jennings, and if you want any one knocked down you

have only to mention the fact and he will do it for you at once."

Isabel looked across at him gratefully. "It's just like having a private army of one's own," she said.

Tony nodded approvingly. "That's the idea exactly. We'll call ourselves the Isabel Defence Force, and we'll make this our headquarters. You are really quite safe, you know, with Mrs. Spalding, but you can always retreat here when you feel specially nervous." He patted her hand encouragingly, and sat back in his chair. "Why not stay here now," he suggested, "until you go shopping? No one will bother you. You can sit in the garden and read a book, or else go to sleep in the hammock. Spalding will get you some lunch when you feel like it."

"Lunch!" echoed Isabel, opening her eyes. "What, after this?" She made an eloquent little gesture towards the sideboard.

"Certainly," said Tony. "The Hampstead climate is very deceptive. One requires a great deal of nourishment."

"Is the nourishment compulsory?" asked Isabel. "If not I think I should like to stay."

"You shall do exactly what you please about everything," said Tony. "I believe in complete freedom—at all events for the upper classes."

He got up, and crossing the room to an old oak bureau in the corner, took out a cheque book from the drawer and filled in a cheque for fifty pounds. This he blotted and handed to Isabel.

"Here's a piece of the brooch for you to go on with," he said. "Jennings will drive you to the bank first, and after that he will take you wherever you want to go. Don't worry about keeping him waiting or anything of that sort. He is quite used to it, and he always looks unhappy in any case."

Isabel daintily folded up the cheque and put it away in her bag. Underneath her obvious gratitude there was a certain air of naturalness about the way she accepted Tony's help that the latter found immensely fascinating. It reminded him somehow of a child or a princess in a fairy story.

"I shall love going shopping again," she began frankly. "It will seem like—" Once more she paused, and then as if she had suddenly changed her mind about what she intended to say, she added a little confusedly: "Oughtn't I to let Mrs. Spalding know that I want her to come with me this afternoon?"

Tony shook his head. "I think we can manage that for you," he said. "The house is full of strong, idle men." He got up from the desk. "Come along and let me introduce you to the library, and then you can find yourself something to read."

He led the way across the hall, and as he opened the door of the apartment in question Isabel gave a little exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Oh, but what a lovely lot of books!" she said. "I should never have guessed you were so fond of reading."

"I'm not," said Tony. "I never read anything

except Swinburne and *The Autocar*. Most of these belonged to my grandfather. Books were a kind of secret vice with him. He collected them all his life and left them to me in his will because he was quite sure they would never get any thumb-marks on them."

Isabel laughed softly, and advancing to the nearest case began to examine the titles. Tony watched her for a moment, and then strolling out into the hall, made his way back to the morning-room, where he pressed the electric bell.

"Spalding," he said, when that incomparable retainer answered his summons, "I have invited Miss Francis to make use of the house and garden as much as she pleases. When I am not in I shall be obliged if you will see that she has everything she wants."

Spalding's face remained superbly impassive. "Certainly, Sir Antony," he replied, with a slight bow.

"And send Bugg here," added Tony. "I want to speak to him before I go out."

Spalding withdrew, and after a moment or two had elapsed, "Tiger" appeared on the threshold hastily swallowing a portion of his interrupted lunch.

"Sorry to disturb you, Bugg," said Tony, "but I want you to do something for me, if you will."

"You on'y got to give it a naime, sir," observed the Tiger with a final and successful gulp.

"I want you to go out in the car this afternoon, as well as Jennings. Miss Francis is going to do some shopping, and it's just possible that the two gentle-

men who were annoying her last night might try the same thing again."

Bugg's grey-green eyes opened in honest amazement. "Wot!" he exclaimed. "Ain't they 'ad enough yet? W'y if I'd knowed that I'd 'ave laid fur the tall one and give 'im another shove in the jaw w'en 'e come outer Court this mornin'." He paused and took an indignant breath. "Wot's their gaim any way, sir—chaisin' a young lidy like that?"

Tony shook his head. "I don't know exactly, Bugg," he said, "but whatever it is I mean to put a stop to it. It is our duty to encourage a high moral standard amongst the inferior races."

"Cert'nly, sir," observed Bugg approvingly. "I always says with a German or a Daigo it's a caise of 'it 'im fust an' argue with 'im arterwards. You can't maike no mistake then, sir."

"It seems a good working principle," admitted Tony. "Still there are occasions in life when strategy—you know what strategy is, Bugg?——"

The other scratched his head. "Somethin' like gettin' a bloke to lead w'en 'e don't want to, sir," he hazarded.

"You have the idea," said Tony. "Well, as I was about to observe, there are occasions in life when strategy is invaluable. I am inclined to think that this is one of them."

Bugg eyed him with questioning interest. "Meanin' to sye, sir?"

"Meaning to say," added Tony, "that I should

rather like to find out who these gentlemen are who are worrying Miss Francis. If we knew their names we might be able to bring a little moral pressure to bear on them. Knocking people down in the street is such an unchristian remedy—besides it gets one into trouble with the police.”

“Then I ain’t to shove it across ’em?” remarked Bugg in a slightly disappointed voice.

Tony shook his head. “Not unless they insist on it,” he said. “As a matter of fact I don’t think there is really much chance of your meeting them: it’s only that I shall feel more comfortable if I know you are in the car.”

Bugg nodded his comprehension. “That’s all right, sir,” he observed reassuringly. “I’ll bring the young laidy back saife an’ ’earty. You leave it ter me.”

“Thank you, Bugg,” said Tony. “I shall now be able to go round Brooklands with a light heart.”

He strolled back to the library, where he found Isabel kneeling upon the broad window-seat looking into a book which she had taken down from a neighbouring shelf. She made a charming picture with her copper-coloured hair gleaming in the sunlight.

“Good-bye, Isabel,” he said. “I wish I could see you again before to-morrow, but I am afraid there isn’t much chance. I can’t very well ask you to dinner because of Cousin Henry. He would rush away and tell all my relations and half the House of Commons.”

A gleam of dismay flashed into Isabel's eyes.

"The House of Commons!" she repeated. "Is your cousin a statesman then, a—a—diplomat?"

"He is under that curious impression," said Tony.

Isabel laid her hand quickly upon his sleeve. "You mustn't let him know I am here. Promise me, won't you? Promise you won't even say that you have met me."

There was a frightened urgency in her demand that filled Tony with a fresh surprise.

"Of course I promise," he said. "I have no intention of telling any one I have met you, and as for telling about you to Henry—well, I should as soon think of playing music to a bullock." He glanced up at the clock. "I must be off," he added. "I will bring the car round to-morrow and we will have a nice long run in the country. In the meanwhile try and remember that you've got absolutely nothing to be frightened about. You are as safe with us as if you were a thousand pound note in the Bank of England."

He gave her fingers an encouraging squeeze, and then leaving her looking after him with grateful eyes, he walked across the hall to the front door, where Jennings was standing beside the big Peugeot.

"Jennings," said Tony, getting into the driving-seat, "I have arranged for you to take Miss Francis shopping this afternoon in the Rolls-Royce. Bugg and Mrs. Spalding will be coming with you."

"Very good, sir," responded Jennings joylessly.

"You will take Miss Francis to my bank first: after that she will give you her own instructions." He paused. "It's just possible you may meet with a little interference from a couple of foreign gentlemen. In that event I shall be obliged if you will assist Bugg in knocking them down."

Jennings' brow darkened. "If any one comes messin' around with my car," he observed bitterly, "I'll take a spanner to 'em quick. I don't hold with this here fist fighting: it's foolishness to my mind."

"Just as you please, Jennings," said Tony. "As the challenged party you will be fully entitled to choose your own weapons."

He slipped in his second speed, and gliding off down the drive emerged on to the Heath. The main road was thickly strewn with nursemaids, and elderly gentlemen, who had apparently selected it as a suitable spot from which to admire the famous view, but avoiding them with some skill, Tony reached the top of Haverstock Hill, and turned up to the right in the direction of the Spaldings' house.

His ring at the bell was answered by Mrs. Spalding herself—a respectable-looking woman of about forty. She welcomed Tony with a slightly flustered air of friendly deference.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Spalding," he said.

"Good-morning, Sir Antony," she replied. "Won't you step inside, sir?"

Tony shook his head. "I mustn't wait now. I have got to be at the Club in twenty minutes. I only came round to thank you for your kindness to

Miss Francis. She tells me you have looked after her like a mother."

Mrs. Spalding seemed pleased, if a trifle embarrassed.

"I am very glad to have been of any service, Sir Antony. Not but what it's been a pleasure to do anything I could for Miss Francis. A very nice young lady, sir—and a real one, too, if I'm any judge of such matters."

"I think you're a first-class judge," said Tony, "and I am glad you like her, because I want her to stay on with you for a bit. The fact of the matter is—" he came a step nearer and his voice assumed a pleasantly confidential tone—"Miss Francis is an orphan, and she has been compelled to leave her guardian because he drinks and treats her badly. Besides he's a foreigner, and you know what most of them are like."

"Not a German, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Spalding feelingly.

"No, it's not quite as bad as that," said Tony. "Still he is a brute, and I have made up my mind to keep her out of his hands until her aunt comes back from America. If you will help us, I think we ought to be able to manage it all right."

The combined chivalry and candour of Tony's attitude in the affair evidently appealed to Mrs. Spalding's finer nature.

"I think you are acting very right, sir," she replied warmly. "A young lady like that didn't ought to be left in charge of a foreigner—let alone

one who's given to the drink. If I can be of any assistance you can count on me, Sir Antony."

"Good!" said Tony. "Well, in the first place, if you can manage it, I want you to go shopping with her this afternoon in the car. She has to buy some clothes and things, and it isn't safe for her to be about in the West End alone. If she came across her guardian he would be quite likely to try and get her back by force."

"They're a desperate lot, some of them foreigners, when they're baulked," observed Mrs. Spalding seriously.

Tony nodded. "That's why I have arranged to send Bugg with you. There is not really much chance of your meeting with any interference, but just in case you did—well, you could leave him to discuss the matter, and come along home." He paused. "You won't let Miss Francis think I have been talking about her private affairs—will you?"

Mrs. Spalding made a dignified protest. "I shouldn't dream of no such thing, Sir Antony. I quite understand as you've been speaking to me in confidence.

Tony held out his hand, which, after a moment's respectful hesitation, the worthy woman accepted.

"Well, I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Spalding," he said. "You have helped me out of a great difficulty." He stepped up into the driving-seat and took hold of the wheel. "The car will be coming round about half-past two," he added, "and I expect Miss Francis will be in it."

Mrs. Spalding curtseyed, and responding with a polite bow over the side, Tony released his brake and glided off down the hill.

He did not drive direct to the Club, for on reaching Oxford Street he made a short detour through Hanover Square, and pulled up outside Murdock and Mason, the long established and highly respectable firm of jewellers. He was evidently known there, for so sooner had he entered the shop than the senior partner, Mr. Charles Mason, a portly, benevolent old gentleman with a white beard, stepped forward to greet him.

"Good-morning, Sir Antony," he observed, smiling pleasantly through his gold-rimmed spectacles; "we haven't had the pleasure of seeing you for quite a long time. I trust you are keeping well?"

"I am very well indeed, thank you, Mr. Mason," said Tony. "In fact I am not at all sure I am not better than I deserve to be." He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out Isabel's brooch. "I have come to ask you if you will do me a kindness."

Mr. Mason beamed more affably than ever. "Anything in my power, at any time, Sir Antony."

"Well, I should like you to tell me how much this is worth. I don't want to sell it: I just want to find out its value."

Mr. Mason took the brooch, and adjusting his spectacles bent over it with professional deliberation. It was not long before he looked up again with a mingled expression of interest and surprise.

"I don't know whether you are aware of the fact,

Sir Antony," he remarked, "but you have a very exceptional piece of old jewellery here. The stone is one of the finest emeralds I have ever seen, and as for the setting—" he again peered curiously at the delicate gold tracery—"well, I don't want to express an opinion too hastily, but I am inclined to put it down as ancient Moorish work of a remarkably beautiful kind." He paused. "I trust that you wouldn't consider it a liberty, Sir Antony, if I inquire whether you could tell me anything of its history."

"It belonged to my cousin's great-grandmother," said Tony placidly. "That's all I know about it at present."

"Indeed," said Mr. Mason, "indeed! It would be of great interest to discover where it was obtained from. A stone of this quality, to say nothing of its exceptionally rare setting, is almost bound to have attracted attention. I should not be surprised to find it had figured in the collection of some very eminent personage."

"What do you suppose it's worth?" asked Tony.

Mr. Mason hesitated for a moment. "Apart from any historical interest it may possess," he replied slowly, "I should put its value at something between five and seven thousand pounds."

"Really!" said Tony. "I had no idea my cousin's great-grandmother was so extravagant." He picked up the brooch. "I wonder if you could find me a nice strong case for it, Mr. Mason. Somebody might run

into me at Brooklands this afternoon, and it would be a pity to get it chipped."

The old jeweller accepted the treasure with almost reverent care, and calling up one of his assistants entrusted it to the latter's charge. In a minute or so the man returned with a neatly fastened and carefully sealed little package, which Tony thrust into his pocket.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Mason," he said, "and thank you so much. If I find out anything more about my cousin's great-grandmother I will let you know."

Bowing and beaming, Mr. Mason led the way to the door. "I should be most interested—most interested, Sir Antony. Such a remarkable piece of work must certainly possess a history. I shouldn't be surprised if it had belonged to any one—any one—from Royalty downwards."

Half-past twelve was just striking when Tony came out of the shop. The distance is not far from Bond Street to Covent Garden, but as intimate students of London are aware the route on occasions is apt to be a trifle congested. It was therefore about ten minutes after the appointed time when Tony pulled up outside the Cosmopolitan and jumping down from the car made his way straight through the hall to Donaldson's private sanctum, where the ceremony of settling up was invariably conducted.

The first person who met his eyes on entering the room was the Marquis da Freitas. Despite his rôle

as payer-out that distinguished statesman appeared to be in the best of spirits, and was chatting away to a small knot of members that included "Doggy" Donaldson and Dick Fisher the referee. In a corner of the room, tastefully arrayed in a check suit and lemon-coloured gloves, lounged the slightly crest-fallen figure of Mr. "Lightning" Lopez.

"I am so sorry to have kept you all waiting," said Tony. "I haven't even the excuse of having to come up from Richmond—like the Marquis."

Da Freitas, who was in the act of lighting a cigar, waved aside the apology with a characteristic gesture. "A few minutes' grace are always permissible, Sir Antony, except where a lady is concerned. As for my own punctuality—" he shrugged his shoulders and showed his white teeth in an amiable smile—"Well, I was staying at Claridge's last night, so I had even less distance to come than you."

There was a short pause. "Well, as we *are* all here," broke in the genial rumble of "Doggy" Donaldson, "what d'ye say to gettin' to work? No good spinning out these little affairs—is it?"

This sentiment seeming to meet with general approval, the company seated themselves round the big table in the centre. The proceedings did not take long, for after Donaldson had written out a cheque for the stakes and purse, and handed fifty pounds, which represented the loser's end, to Lopez, there remained nothing else to do except to settle up private wagers. Tony, who was occupying the pleasant position of receiver-general, stuffed away

the spoils into his pocket, and then following the time-honoured custom of the Club on such occasions, sent out for a magnum of champagne.

"I am sorry the King isn't with us," he observed to da Freitas. "I should like to drink his health and wish him better luck next time."

"We all should!" exclaimed "Doggy" filling up his glass. "Gentlemen, here's to our distinguished fellow-member, King Pedro of Livadia, and may he soon get his own back on those dirty skunks who gave him the chuck."

A general chorus of "Hear, hear," "Bravo," greeted this elegant little ovation, for if Pedro himself had failed to inspire any particular affection in the Club, its members shared to the full that fine reverence for the Royal Principle which is invariably found amongst sportsmen, actors, licensed victuallers, and elderly ladies in boarding-houses.

The Marquis da Freitas acknowledged the toast with that easy and polished urbanity which distinguished all his actions.

"I can assure you, gentlemen," he observed, "that amongst the many agreeable experiences that have lightened His Majesty's temporary exile there is none that he will look back on with more pleasure than his association with the Cosmopolitan Club. It is His Majesty's earnest hope, and may I add mine also, that in the happy and I trust not far distant days when our at present afflicted country has succeeded in ridding herself of traitors and oppressors we shall have the opportunity of return-

ing some portion of that hospitality which has been so generously lavished on us in England. I can only add that there will never be any visitors to Livadia more welcome to us than our friends of the Cosmopolitan Club."

A heartfelt outburst of applause greeted these sentiments—the idea of being the personal guests of a reigning sovereign distinctly appealing to the members present.

"I hope he means it," whispered "Doggy" Donaldson in Tony's ear. "I'd like to see a bit of bull fightin', and they tell me the Livadian gals—" He smacked his lips thoughtfully as though in anticipation of what might be accomplished under the ægis of a royal patron.

Having created this favourable impression the Marquis da Freitas looked at his watch and announced that he must be going. Tony, who had promised to lunch at Brooklands before the trial, also rose to take his departure, and together they passed out of the room and down the corridor.

As they reached the hall, the swing door that led out into the street was suddenly pushed open and a man in a frock coat and top hat strode into the Club. He was a remarkable-looking gentleman—not unlike an elderly and fashionably dressed edition of Don Quixote. A dyed imperial and carefully corseted figure gave him at first sight the appearance of being younger than he really was, but his age could not have been far short of sixty.

The most striking thing about him, however, was

his obvious agitation. His face was worried and haggard, and his hands were switching nervously like those of a man suffering from some uncontrollable mental excitement.

He came straight across the hall towards the porter's box, and then catching sight of da Freitas turned towards him with an involuntary interjection of relief.

"Oh, you *are* here," he exclaimed. "Thank God I——"

He paused abruptly as he suddenly perceived Tony in the background, and at the same instant the Marquis stepped forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"My dear fellow," he said in that smooth, masterful voice of his, "how good of you to look me up! Come along in here and have a chat."

On the right of the hall was a small room specially reserved for the entertainment of visitors, and before the stranger could have uttered another syllable—even if he had wished to, the Marquis had drawn him across the threshold and closed the door behind them.

For several seconds Tony remained where he was, contemplating the spot where they had disappeared. Then, with that pleasant, unhurried smile of his, he pulled out his case, and slowly and thoughtfully lighted himself a cigarette.

"One might almost imagine," he observed, "that da Freitas didn't want to take me into his confidence."

CHAPTER VII

BUGG'S STRATEGY

THERE was a knock outside.

"Come in," said Tony, who was arranging his tie in front of the glass.

The door opened, and Guy Oliver walked into the bedroom. He was in evening dress, which if possible made him look more sedate than ever.

"Hullo, Guy!" said Tony; "I am afraid I am a little late. Is Cousin Henry fuming on the mat?"

Guy shook his head. "He hasn't turned up yet: it's only just gone half-past." He seated himself on the end of the bed. "How did you get on at Brooklands?" he asked.

Tony stepped back from the glass and contemplated his tie with some satisfaction.

"I had quite a cheerful day," he replied. "I managed to squeeze eighty-six out of her, and finished up by breaking the back-axle."

Guy nodded grimly. "You will break your neck some day," he observed, "and then I suppose you will be satisfied."

"I doubt it," said Tony; "not if our present theology is anything approaching accurate." He

picked up a dinner-jacket from the bed and began slowly to put it on. "Besides," he added thoughtfully, "I shouldn't like to die just yet. I think I see a chance of doing a little good in the world."

Guy looked at him suspiciously. "Who was that girl you had to breakfast with you?" he asked.

"Really, Guy!" said Tony, "you get more cynical every day." He crossed to the washstand, and taking a carnation out of its glass proceeded to arrange it in his button-hole.

"But who is she?" persisted Guy.

"She is my adopted cousin. Her name is Isabel—Isabel Francis. I adopted her after breakfast this morning."

There was a short pause. Then in a faintly ironical voice Guy observed: "Since she appears to be a relation of mine also, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me where and when you met her."

"Not in the least," said Tony imperturbably. "We met each other in Long Acre last night at about a quarter to eleven."

"Where?" exclaimed Guy.

"Long Acre," repeated Tony. "It's a popular thoroughfare running out of Leicester Square." He watched his cousin's face for a moment with some enjoyment, and then added: "If you would try to look less like the recording angel I might tell you all about it."

"Go on," said Guy.

Tony paused to light a cigarette, and then seated himself on the bed. "It was like this," he began.

"Bugg and I were coming down Long Acre after the fight, when we saw Isabel being—being—what's the word—'accosted' by a couple of gentlemen who looked like dressed-up organ-grinders. As an Englishman and a baronet I thought it was my duty to interfere."

"You would," said Guy with conviction.

"Leaving Bugg to knock down the two gentlemen," proceeded Tony tranquilly, "I took Isabel to supper at Verrier's. We had a very good supper. There was——"

"Never mind about the supper," interrupted Guy. "How did she come to be having breakfast with you this morning?"

"What a dreadfully direct mind you have," complained Tony. "There is no pleasure in telling you a story." He paused. "The fact was," he added, "that Isabel had nowhere to sleep, so I brought her back to Mrs. Spalding's."

"You *what*?" demanded Guy.

"I brought her back to Mrs. Spalding's. I couldn't very well bring her here: I knew it would shock you. That's the worst of having a thoughtful nature like mine."

"I say, is all this true?" asked Guy.

"Of course it is," said Tony. "Perfectly true. I couldn't invent anything half so interesting."

"You mean to say that you picked up a girl in Long Acre, and that you've actually brought her back and—and established her at the Spaldings'!"

"My dear Guy!" said Tony. "Please don't

talk like that. It reminds me of one of Hall Caine's heroes." He stopped to flick the ash off his cigarette. "You've seen Isabel. You surely don't think she is an abandoned adventuress, do you?"

"No," said Guy. "I never suggested it: at least I never meant to. She seemed quite a nice girl in her way, but—but—well, who is she, and what on earth is she doing wandering about London without any friends?"

"I don't know," said Tony. "I think she has run away from somewhere and doesn't want to go back. The only thing I am certain about is that she had a very extravagant great-grandmother."

Guy got up from the bed. "Well," he said, "I have seen you do some fairly insane things in my time, but this is about the limit. Why the girl may be anything or anybody."

"I know," interrupted Tony. "It's the uncertainty that makes it so exciting."

"But think of the position you're putting yourself in! Suppose she has run away from school and her parents were to trace her here, why there would be a scandal that would ruin the family!"

"Well, what do you think I ought to do?" asked Tony. "Turn her out again into the cold hard world?"

Guy shrugged his shoulders. "You must do what you like," he said. "I'm not going to accept any responsibility. I have given you my opinion, and if you don't choose——"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door, followed

almost immediately by the appearance of Spalding, who was carrying a note upon a small silver tray. He crossed the room and proffered the letter to Tony.

"Mr. Conway has just arrived, Sir Antony," he remarked. "He is in the drawing-room."

"What's this?" asked Tony, picking up the note.

"I believe it is a communication from Bugg, Sir Antony. Mrs. Spalding brought it round."

Tony turned to his cousin. "You might go down and kiss Henry, will you, Guy?" he said. "I will be with you in a second."

Guy left the room, and tearing open the envelope, Tony took out the letter inside. It was written in a sprawling, illiterate hand, and beautifully innocent of either stops or capitals.

sir i and the young lady come home safe but i spotted one of them forin blokes hanging round the corner of the street so i says to meself I'd better stop here till i heres from you becos i think he may be after the young lady and Mrs S. says its all rite and i can sleep in the kitchin and hoping i done rite your obedient servent tiger bugg the young lady didnt spot the bloke.

Tony read this interesting missive through with extreme care and then looked up at the expressionless face of Spalding.

"For various reasons," he said, "it would be very convenient if Bugg could sleep at your house for the next day or so. I suppose you would have no objection if your wife approved?"

"None at all, Sir Antony," replied Spalding. "I make it a point never to object to anything of which Mrs. Spalding approves."

Tony regarded him thoughtfully. "I should imagine you were a most considerate husband, Spalding," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Spalding. "My wife sees to that, sir."

Folding up the note and putting it in his pocket, Tony made his way downstairs to the drawing-room, where he found Guy in conversation with a heavily-built, pink-faced, stolid-looking man of about forty years of age. This was Henry Conway, a first cousin of both Tony and Guy, and an intensely serious and painstaking member of the House of Commons. He had married Lady Laura Crampton, the plain but public-spirited daughter of the Earl of Kent—an alliance which had been of considerable assistance to them both in their disinterested efforts in behalf of the general welfare.

"Hullo, Henry," said Tony, coming forward with a well-assumed air of pleasure. "I am so sorry to be late. How's Laura?"

Henry shook hands.

"Laura is fairly well, thank you, Tony," he replied. "I think she's a little overtaxed her strength in working up this new league for closing the public-houses to women, but no doubt she will soon be herself again. Her recuperative powers are wonderful, quite wonderful."

"I know," said Tony. "I suppose the feeling

that one is promoting the happiness of one's fellow-creatures acts as a sort of stimulus."

Henry nodded, and taking out his handkerchief blew his nose resonantly. "If it were not for that," he observed, "the strain of public life would at times be almost intolerable."

There was a short pause, broken by the opportune appearance of Spalding with the announcement that dinner was ready.

Throughout the meal the conversation remained fairly general. Henry was rich in that type of intelligence which enables its possessor to discourse copiously and decisively upon every possible topic without puzzling the listener by introducing subtle or original views. Politics in some shape or other were of course his principal theme, and in view of Guy's warning, Tony expected every moment that the menacing question of Balham North would obtrude itself above the horizon. Apparently, however, in Henry's opinion, the presence of Spalding acted as a barrier, and it was not until dinner was finished and they were sitting alone over their coffee and cigars that he began to approach the subject which was really the cause of his visit.

"I understand," he said turning to Tony, "that Guy has more or less acquainted you with the steps that I have been taking in your interest."

Tony nodded. "It's exceedingly kind of you, Henry," he said. "The only thing is I haven't quite made up my mind yet whether I have the necessary qualifications for a successful statesman."

Henry's eyebrows contracted. "I was under the impression," he said, "that we had already settled that part of the affair."

"You and Laura may have settled it," replied Tony. "In important matters of this sort I always prefer a little time for reflection."

Henry pushed back his chair from the table. "And may I inquire," he asked with an obvious attempt at irony, "what you would consider 'a little time'? It seems to me that six years ought to be a sufficient period in which to decide what one intends to do with one's self." He paused. "Unless, of course, you prefer to go on doing nothing."

"Nothing!" echoed Tony reprovingly. "My dear Henry! What a way in which to describe my multifarious activities."

With the stern self-control engendered by a public career Henry managed to keep his temper. "I am speaking of useful and serious work in the world," he replied. "You did your duty in the war certainly, but since then you seem to have devoted your life entirely to frivolous amusements."

"There is precious little frivolity about motor-racing," objected Tony. "You should have been with me to-day when the back-axle went."

"Thank you," said Henry stiffly. "I have something better to do with my time." He looked across at Guy. "I think you agree with me that the manner in which Tony is wasting his life is nothing short of deplorable."

"Certainly I do," said Guy. "I was telling him so at dinner last night."

Henry nodded. "The whole family are of the same opinion." He turned back to Tony. "It isn't as if you were a private individual and able to do what you please. A great position has its obligations as well as its privileges. The Conways have always played an important part in public life, and as head of the family it is your duty to see that this tradition is maintained."

Tony looked at him with a certain amount of admiration. "If I only had your gifts, Henry," he said, "I shouldn't hesitate a moment, but I don't believe I could ever learn to talk as you do."

Henry acknowledged the compliment with a pleased if slightly patronizing smile. "Oh, I don't know," he observed more graciously. "I believe you have considerable ability if you chose to exercise it. Of course one can't expect to become a finished speaker all in a moment, but it's wonderful what a little practice and experience will do. Besides you would have the benefit of my advice and assistance from the start."

"I am sure I should," said Tony, "and Laura's, too, I expect."

Henry nodded. "No one is more interested in your future than Laura is. It was her original idea that I should bring your name forward for Balham North. You can count on having her by your side through the whole campaign."

"It's my belief," interrupted Guy a little hastily,

"that Tony would thoroughly enjoy an election. The element of fighting about it ought to suit him exactly."

"I wish it was some other place than Balham North though," observed Tony pensively. "I can't see myself saying 'Men of Balham!' with just the proper ring that the phrase ought to have."

Henry looked at him a shade mistrustfully. "I only hope," he replied, "that you intend to approach the matter in a serious spirit. I have gone out of my way to put your name forward, and it might do me a great deal of harm politically, if you choose to make a deliberate fiasco of it."

With a reassuring smile, Tony pushed the port towards him.

"Don't you worry, Henry," he said. "When I take a thing up I always carry it through decently and properly, don't I, Guy?"

"You carry it through, certainly," admitted the latter.

"Then I understand," said Henry refilling his glass, "that I can inform Headquarters you are prepared to contest the seat at the next election."

There was a short pause.

"I suppose so," said Tony. "If it will really give the family so much pleasure I haven't the heart to refuse. I am afraid it will mean a lot of extra work for Guy, though."

"You needn't mind about me," put in Guy unsympathetically.

"And how does one start?" asked Tony. "I

have read somewhere about people nursing a constituency. Do we have to go down and nurse Balham?"

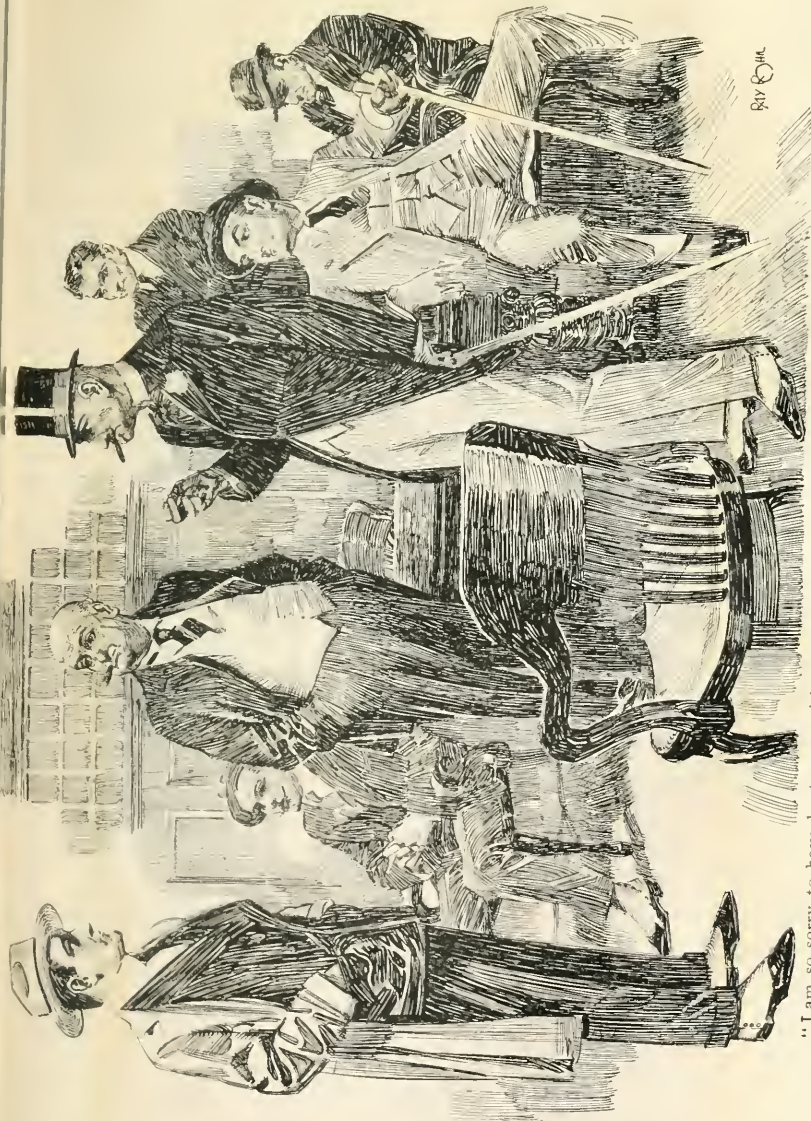
Henry shook his head. "There is no hurry," he said. "Sir George Wilmer has given us a private hint that he means to retire at the next election, but he is not going to make his intention public until Christmas. Properly used, this time will be invaluable to you."

Tony nodded thoughtfully. "Yes," he said. "I shall enjoy a last run round before becoming an M.P. One has got to be so devilish careful what one does then."

"I was referring rather," said Henry with some coldness, "to the opportunity it will afford you of preparing yourself for your new position. If you choose to work hard you might by that time have put yourself in the way of becoming a useful and desirable acquisition to the House."

"Why, of course," said Tony. "I never thought of looking at it like that." He paused. "What would you advise me to work at?"

"If I were you," said Henry, "I should take up some special subject—it doesn't much matter what it is—foreign affairs, temperance, agriculture—anything which is frequently before the House. Make yourself more or less of an authority on that, and then you will have a recognized position from the very start." He stopped to consult his watch. "I am afraid I shall have to be going," he added. "I have promised to look in and say a few words to the West



"I am so sorry to have kept you waiting," said Tony. "I haven't even the excuse of having to come up from Richmond—like the Marquis."

Da Freitas, who was in the act of lighting a cigar, waved aside the apology. "A few minutes' grace are always permissible, Sir Antony, except where a lady is concerned."

Hampstead Anti-Vivisection League, who are holding their annual meeting to-night, and it's getting on for ten o'clock now." He got up and held out a large, white, soft hand, which Tony accepted with a certain physical reluctance that hands of that sort always inspired in him.

"I am pleased—very pleased," continued Henry, "that you are at last beginning to realize the responsibilities of your position. When the time comes you may rest assured that Laura and I will give you any assistance in our power. In the meantime, if you want any advice about what to read or study, you can't do better than to talk it over with Guy."

Tony nodded again. "I expect we shall have lots of interesting chats together," he said.

He rang the bell for Henry's car, and accompanying his cousin into the hall, helped him on with his coat. They stood talking in the doorway until a well-appointed Daimler brougham rolled up noiselessly to the porch, and then with another handshake and a final good-night Tony returned to the dining-room.

He sat down heavily in his lately vacated chair. "If you have any real love for me, Guy," he said, "you will pass me the brandy."

Guy handed across a delicately shaped old Venetian decanter, out of which Tony helped himself in generous fashion.

"If I had an inn," he observed, "I should pay Henry to sit in the bar parlour and talk about poli-

tics. I am sure he would drive the customers to drink."

In spite of himself Guy smiled. "I think you are very unfair and very ungrateful," he replied serenely. "Henry may be a little pompous at times, but after all he means well, and he has your best interests at heart."

Tony lit himself another cigar. "All my relations have," he said, "and the worst of it is, it's such a horribly infectious complaint. If I am not uncommonly careful I shall be catching it myself."

"You have managed to resist it pretty successfully so far," observed Guy drily.

"I know," said Tony, "but that doesn't make me feel really safe. There is a sort of natural tendency to take one's self seriously in the Conway blood, and you can never be certain it won't suddenly come bursting out. I shouldn't be in the least surprised if I finished up by getting the Victorian Order, and the freedom of Manchester."

"I suppose you do really mean to stand?" said Guy after a short pause.

"I suppose so," replied Tony. "I think I would agree to do anything rather than argue with Henry."

He pushed back his chair and finishing off the brandy in his glass, rose to his feet.

"Going out?" asked Guy.

Tony nodded. "Just for a few minutes. It's a very important step in one's life to become a mem-

ber of Parliament—especially for Balham North. I am going to have a little quiet meditation beneath the stars.”

Guy looked at him disbelievingly. “Umph!” he observed, and taking out his favourite after-dinner smoke—a short, well-seasoned briar pipe, began methodically to fill it from his pouch.

Leaving him to this innocent luxury, Tony crossed the hall, and without troubling to pick up a hat sauntered leisurely out of the house and down the drive. It was a perfect night. Under a sky of inky blue, powdered with stars, the Heath lay dark and silent, as if dreaming regretfully of those far gone spacious times when the mounted highwaymen lurked amongst its bushes.

The only people who lurked there at present were much too occupied with each other to pay any attention to Tony. With his cigar glowing pleasantly in the darkness he strolled slowly across the grass in the direction of the water-works, which stood up in a clear-cut, black mass against the clearness of the night sky.

A few yards further brought him to the end of the quiet road in which the Spaldings' house was situated. It was overshadowed by trees, but in the light of a street lamp some little way down, he caught sight of a solitary, bare-headed figure leaning over one of the front gates. Even at that distance he could recognize the familiar features of “Tiger” Bugg.

As Tony came up, the future world's champion

lifted the latch, and stepped out noiselessly on to the pavement to meet him.

"I guessed it was you, sir," he observed in a low voice. "You didn't 'appen to spot no one 'angin' abaht under them trees as you come along?"

Tony shook his head, and seated himself on the low wall with his back to the railings. "No, Bugg," he said. "The road seemed to me distinctly empty."

Under the lamp-light, "Tiger's" face assumed an expression of disappointment. "Ah!" he remarked, "I reckon they've spotted I'm layin' for 'em arter all." He paused. "You got my letter, sir?"

"Yes, thank you, Bugg," said Tony. "I want you to tell me all about it."

"I don't know as there's very much to tell, sir," responded Bugg modestly. "It was like this 'ere, sir. The young laidy done 'er shopping nice and comf'table, and there 'adn't bin no sign of any one 'anging arahnd or wantin' to maike trouble. We wos comin' back in the car and I was just thinkin' to meself as things was all right, w'en Jennings swung 'er a bit lively rahnd that bottom corner there,"—he jerked his thumb away down the road—"and all of a sudden I seed a 'ead dodgin' back be'ind one o' them big trees. 'E was quick, but 'e weren't quite quick enough for me. I knew 'is dirty faice the moment I set me eyes on it. It was the other Daigo—the one that copped a shove in the jaw last night and done a buck w'en the rozzers come."

"You don't think Miss Francis saw him?" interrupted Tony.

Bugg shook his head. "No one seen 'im except me, sir; and I didn't say nothin', not bein' wishful to frighten the young laidy. Besides, it come into me 'ead wot you'd said abaht leadin' 'em on like, so I jest sits w're I was till we reaches the 'ouse, an' then I gets out an' goes inside saime as if I 'adn't seen nothing. I 'ope I done right, sir?"

"Sherlock Holmes couldn't have done righter," observed Tony. "I wonder how the devil they've found out the house though."

Bugg scratched his ear. "Well, sir, I bin thinkin 'it over like, sir, and I reckon they must ha' followed me this mornin', w'en I come up from the Court."

Tony looked at him admiringly. "Bugg," he said, "you are growing positively brilliant. I have no doubt that's the correct explanation. They were probably hanging about outside Goodman's Rest and saw Miss Francis come back here in the car." He paused and took a thoughtful draw at his cigar. "I suppose they're waiting for a chance to get her alone again."

Bugg nodded. "That's abaht it, sir; and that's w'y I thought I'd best stop on 'ere. I see Mrs. Spalding knew something o' wot was up, so I gives 'er the orfice straight abaht 'avin' spotted the bloke be'ind the tree, and she suggests as I should write to you an' she'll taik the letter rahnd." He cleared his throat, and expectorated in the gutter. "And that's 'ow things are, sir, in a manner o' speaking."

Tony knocked the ash off his cigar and got up from his seat.

"I am vastly obliged to you, Bugg," he said. "You are an ideal secretary for a knight errant." He looked up at the house, the windows of which were in darkness. "Have they gone to bed?" he asked.

"I think the young lady's turned in, sir," replied Bugg. "I reckon she was tired buyin' all them 'ats and things. Mrs. Spalding's abaht, if ye'd like to see 'er, sir."

He opened the gate for Tony, and they walked up the narrow cobbled path which led to the house. The front door was ajar, and just as they entered Mrs. Spalding appeared in the passage, with a can of hot water in her hand. She put it down on seeing Tony, and with her usual air of slightly flustered deference, opened the door of Isabel's sitting-room, and invited him to "step inside."

"I am not going to keep you up, Mrs. Spalding," he said cheerfully. "I only came round in answer to Bugg's letter. It struck me that you might possibly be feeling a little nervous, and I shouldn't like to think that you were being worried in any way about my affairs."

His consideration evidently touched Mrs. Spalding deeply.

"Oh, please to put your mind at ease about that, Sir Antony," she observed. "As long as Bugg's on the premises it doesn't frighten me if people choose to hang about outside the house."

"Of course," said Tony, pursuing his advantage, "if you would rather, I could probably arrange to

get rooms for Miss Francis somewhere else. The only thing is her guardian would most certainly find out, and Heaven knows what might happen to her then!"

The good woman made a gesture of protest. "You mustn't think of it, Sir Antony," she declared. "I wouldn't never forgive myself if that sweet young lady was got back by them foreigners. I've taken a rare liking to her, Sir Antony, and it's an honour and a pleasure to be of any assistance. I was saying as much to Spalding to-night, an' he agreed with me every word."

Tony launched an inward blessing on Spalding's philosophic theories about matrimonial happiness.

"Well, if you both feel like that," he said, "I shall go on taking advantage of your kindness. It won't be for long, because Miss Francis' aunt is bound to be coming back soon. In the meanwhile,"—he turned to include Bugg, who, with his usual tact, had remained modestly on the doorstep, "we will soon put a stop to this spying business. I am not going to have dirty looking people popping in and out behind trees anywhere near my house. The rates are much too high to put up with that sort of thing." He stopped to take another puff at his cigar, which he had nearly allowed to go out. "I suppose Miss Francis has gone to bed?" he asked.

Mrs. Spalding nodded. "It's what you might call tiring work—shopping is, Sir Antony, especially when a young lady's used to having most things done for her, as I can see Miss Francis is." She paused.

"I was just taking her up some hot water when you came in," she added.

"Really," said Tony; "well, we mustn't keep it waiting about or it will be losing its character." He turned towards the door. "By the way," he added, "you might tell Miss Francis that if she would care for a motor drive to-morrow I should be delighted to take her. I daresay she will be coming round in the morning and we can fix up the time then."

Mrs. Spalding promised to deliver the message, and wishing her good-night, Tony sauntered off down the drive, with his hand on Bugg's shoulder. They came to a halt at the gate.

"It's an undignified position for the future champion of England to be acting as a watch-dog, Bugg," he said, "but having put our hands to the plough—" He broke off and remained for a moment or two thoughtfully contemplating the star-spangled stretch of firmament which was visible between the trees.

With an expression of patient interest, Bugg waited for him to continue.

"Let us summarize the situation, Bugg," he said gravely. "Then we shall know exactly where we are." He paused. "For some reason, which I don't understand any more than you do at present, those two gentlemen we had the pleasure of introducing ourselves to in Long Acre appear to be very anxious to meet Miss Francis alone. Well, she doesn't want to be met, and considering their faces I sympathize with her taste. That's all we know, and until we can find out something more there

doesn't seem very much to be done. We must just keep Miss Francis properly watched and guarded, and see if we can pick up any information about our pals outside." He paused again. "I think it's just on the cards we might have a little quiet fun with them before long, Bugg," he added pensively.

Bugg gave an appreciative grin and nodded his head. "You can leave the watchin' and guardin' part to me, sir. They won't get no talk with the young lady—not while she's in this 'ouse."

"I believe you, Bugg," said Tony, "and to-morrow morning, when she comes to Goodman's Rest, you might walk across the Heath with her." He opened the gate and stepped out on to the pavement. "Good-night," he added. "I shall go back to bed now. To be really successful as a knight errant one requires plenty of sleep."

"Yes, sir," said Bugg. "Good-night, sir."

It was exactly a quarter to eleven by the big oak clock in the hall when Tony re-entered his house. He shut the front door behind him, and walking across looked into the dining-room and study to see if Guy were still up. Both rooms were empty, and he was just on the point of going upstairs when the silence of the house was suddenly broken by the sharp, aggressive ringing of a bell.

It came from the telephone which hung beside the mantelpiece on the further side of the hall.

CHAPTER VIII

AFFAIRS IN LIVADIA

TONY retraced his steps and took down the receiver.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Hullo!" came back a silvery answer. "Is that you, Tony?"

"It is. Who's speaking?"

"It's me."

"Really!" said Tony. "Which me? I know several with beautiful voices."

A little ripple of laughter floated down the wire. "Don't be funny, Tony. It's Molly—Molly Monk. I want to see you."

"The longing is a mutual one," observed Tony. "I was just going to bed, but it's a morbid custom. Suppose I come along in the car instead and take you out to supper?"

"I'd love it," answered Molly regretfully, "but I'm afraid it can't be done. I have promised to go on and sing at one of Billy Higginson's evenings. He is the only composer in London who can write a tune." She paused. "What about to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," said Tony, "is also a day."

"Well, I am going out to lunch, but I *do* want to

see you if you could manage it. Couldn't you run over in the car and look me up some time in the morning? I'll give you a small bottle of champagne if you will."

"I don't want any bribing," said Tony with dignity. "Is it good champagne?"

"Very good," said Molly. "It's what I keep for dramatic critics."

"I think I might be able to come then. What is it you want to see me about?"

"Oh, I'll tell you to-morrow," came back the answer. "I really mustn't stop now because Daisy Grey's waiting for me in her car. Thanks so much. It's awfully dear of you, Tony. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Tony, and replacing the receiver upon its hook, he resumed his interrupted progress to bed.

It was just after half-past ten the next morning, when Guy, while busily engaged in drawing up a lease in his office, was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in," he called out, and in answer to his summons, Tony, wearing a grey plush hat and motor-ing gloves, sauntered into the room. He looked round with an air of leisurely interest.

"Good-morning, Guy," he said. "I like interrupting you at this time. I always feel I am throwing you out for the entire day."

Guy laid down his pen.

"It's a harmless delusion," he observed, "and if it gets you out of bed——"

"Oh, that didn't get me out of bed. It was an appointment I have to keep." He walked across to the fireplace and helped himself to a cigarette from a box on the mantelpiece. "Are you feeling in a sympathetic mood this morning, Guy?"

The latter shook his head. "Not particularly. Why?"

Tony struck a match. "Well, it's like this. I have invited our cousin Isabel to come round and see me, and now I find myself unexpectedly compelled to go out. What's more I don't know how long it will be before I get back." He paused and looked at Guy with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "Do you think I can trust you to be kind and gentle with her?"

Guy adjusted his pince-nez and looked across at Tony with some sternness.

"I have already told you, Tony," he said, "that I disapprove very strongly of this impossible escapade of yours. You don't know what trouble it may lead you into. For a man who wants to get into Parliament any kind of scandal is absolutely fatal."

"But I don't want to go into Parliament," objected Tony. "I am doing it to oblige Henry, and for the good of the nation. As for this—what was the beautiful word you used, Guy—'escapade'—you surely wouldn't have me back out from motives of funk?"

Guy shrugged his shoulders. "You can please yourself about it," he said, "but it's no good asking

me to help you. As I've told you before, I decline to mix myself up with it in any way."

"But you can't," persisted Tony; "at least not without being horribly rude. I have introduced you to Isabel and she thinks you're charming. She will be sure to ask for you when she hears I am out." He paused. "You wouldn't be a brute to her would you, Guy? You wouldn't throw her out of the house or anything like that?"

Guy's lips tightened. "I should certainly let her see that I disapproved very strongly of the whole episode," he said. "Still you needn't worry about that, because I have not the least intention of meeting her."

He picked up his pen and began to resume his work.

"Yours is a very hard nature, Guy," said Tony sadly. "I think it's the result of never having known a woman's love."

To this Guy did not condescend to answer, and after looking at him for a moment with a grieved expression, Tony sauntered downstairs to the front door.

Outside stood the Hispano-Suiza—a long, slim, venomous-looking white car—with Jennings in attendance. Tony stepped in and took possession of the wheel.

"I shall probably be back in about an hour, Jennings," he said, "and very likely I shall be going out again afterwards. I don't know which car I shall want, so you had better have them all ready."

Jennings touched his cap with the expression of a

resigned lemon ice, and pressing the electric starter Tony glided off down the drive.

He reached Basil Mansions just on the stroke of eleven. Leaving the car in the courtyard he walked across to Molly's flat, where the door was answered by the beautiful French maid, who looked purer than ever in the healthy morning sunshine.

As he entered the flat, Molly appeared in the hall. She was wearing a loose garment of green silk, caught together at the waist by a gold girdle. As a breakfast robe it erred perhaps on the side of the fantastic, but it had the merit of showing off her red hair to the best possible advantage.

"You nice old thing, Tony," she said. "I know you hate getting up early, too."

"I don't mind if there is anything to get up for," said Tony. "It's the barrenness of the morning that puts me off as a rule."

Molly slipped her bare arm through his, and led him into the sitting-room.

"You shall open the champagne," she said. "That will give you an interest in life."

She brought him up to a little satin-wood table, on which stood a silver tray, with some glasses and a couple of small bottles of Heidsieck. Tony looked at the labels.

"And do you mean to say," he remarked a little reproachfully, "that you really waste this on dramatic critics?"

"I give them the choice," said Molly gravely. "They can either have that, or hold my hand. So

far they have always chosen the champagne." She crossed to the sofa and began arranging the cushions. "Yank out the cork, Tony," she added, "and then come and sit beside me. I want you to give me some of your very best advice."

Tony obeyed her instructions, and filling up the two glasses, carried the tray across to where Molly was reclining. He set it down on the floor within convenient reach, and then seated himself beside her on the sofa.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired sympathetically.

Molly lighted herself a cigarette, and thoughtfully puffed out a little cloud of blue smoke.

"It's Peter," she said. "Something has happened to him; something serious."

"I know it has," said Tony. "He had to pay me five hundred of the best yesterday morning."

Molly shook her head. "It's not that," she said. "I know he hates being beaten at anything; but it wouldn't upset him in the way I mean." She wriggled herself into a slightly more comfortable position. "I've got a notion it's something much bigger," she added.

"Really!" said Tony with interest. "What are the symptoms?"

"Well, he was coming to lunch here yesterday at a quarter to two, and he rang up about one to say he might be a little late. I thought his voice sounded a bit funny over the 'phone—you see I know Peter pretty well by now—and when he rolled up I saw

there was something really serious the matter. The poor old dear was so worried and excited he could hardly eat his lunch."

"Sounds bad," admitted Tony. "Nothing but a desperate crisis can put Royalty off their food."

Molly nodded. "I know. I thought for a moment he might have fallen in love with somebody else, but it wasn't that either. Something's happened, and unless I'm three parts of an idiot it's got to do with Livadia."

"How exciting!" observed Tony. "It makes me feel like a secret service man in a novel." He paused. "Why do you think it's Livadia though? It might——"

"If it wasn't Livadia," interrupted Molly, "he'd have told me all about it."

"Why didn't you ask him?"

Molly shook her head. "It's no good. He has promised da Freitas never to talk about Livadian affairs to anybody, and he's just sufficiently stupid to keep his word even where I'm concerned. Of course I could get it out of him sooner or later, but you can't rush Peter, and it's a question of time. There's something going on, and I want to find out what it is as quick as possible." She sat up and looked at Tony. "That's where you come in," she added.

Tony looked at her in mild surprise. "I would love to help you if I could, Molly," he said, "but I'm afraid that any lingering charm I may have had for your Peter vanished with that five hundred quid he had to fork out yesterday."

"You can help me all right if you will," said Molly. She paused. "Do you remember telling me once about that friend of yours—what's his name?—the boy who is running a motor business in Portriga?"

The dawn of an understanding began to flicker across Tony's face.

"You mean Jimmy—Jimmy Dale." He paused. "If Jimmy can be of any use you have only got to say so. I am sure he will do anything I ask him short of murdering the President."

"It's nothing as difficult as that," said Molly. "I only want him to write me a letter." She bent forward and re-lit her cigarette from Tony's. "You see I want to know exactly what's happening out in Livadia. I am sure there's trouble on, or Peter wouldn't be so upset, and a man actually living in Portriga ought to be able to tell one something."

"Jimmy ought to," said Tony. "He is by way of being rather a pal of the President. He sold him a second-hand Rolls-Royce last year for a sort of state coach, and the old boy was so pleased with his bargain he quite took Jimmy up. They seemed to be as thick as thieves last time I had a letter—about three months ago." He paused to finish his champagne. "By the way," he added, "I don't believe I have ever answered it."

"You never do answer letters," said Molly. "That's why I always telephone." She got up, and walking across to a small satin-wood bureau, took out a sheet of paper and an envelope. "Be a darling

and answer it now," she went on. "Then you can ask what I want at the same time."

Tony rose in a leisurely manner from the sofa, and coming up to where she was standing, seated himself in the chair which she had placed in readiness. Then he picked up the pen and examined it with some disapproval.

"I shall ink my fingers," he said. "I always do unless I have a Waterman."

"Never mind," said Molly. "It's in a good cause, and I'll wash them for you afterwards."

Tony gazed thoughtfully at the paper, and then placing his cigarette on the inkstand in front of him bent over the desk and set about his task. Molly returned to the sofa, and for a few minutes except for the scratching of the nib, and an occasional sigh from the writer, a profound silence brooded over the boudoir.

At last, with an air of some relief, Tony threw down the pen, and turned round in his chair.

"How will this do?" he asked.

MY DEAR JAMES:

I have been meaning to answer your last letter for several months, but somehow or other I can never settle down to serious work in the early spring. I was very pleased to hear that you are still alive, and mixing in such good society. I have never met any presidents myself, but I always picture them as stout, elderly men with bowler hats and red sashes round their waists. If yours isn't like this, don't tell me. I hate to have my illusions shattered.

I wish anyway that you would come back to London. You were the only friend I ever had that I could be certain of beating at billiards, and you have no right to bury a talent like that in the wilds of Livadia.

If you will come soon you can do me a good turn. I am thinking of opening a garage in Piccadilly on entirely new lines, and I want someone to manage it for me. The idea would be that customers could put up their cars there, and when they came to fetch them they would find their tools and gasoline absolutely untouched. I am sure it would be a terrific success just on account of its novelty. We would call it "The Sign of the Eighth Commandment," and we should be able to charge fairly high prices, because people would be so dazed at finding they hadn't been robbed that they would never notice what we were asking. I am quite serious about this, Jimmy, so come along back at once before the Livadians further corrupt your natural dishonesty.

Talking of Livadia, there is something I want you to do for me before you leave. I have a young and beautiful friend who takes a morbid interest in your local politics, and she is extremely anxious to know exactly what is happening out there at the present time. I told her that if there was any really promising villainy in the offing you would be sure to know all about it, so don't destroy the good impression of you I have taken the trouble to give her. Sit down and write me a nice, bright, chatty letter telling me who is going to be murdered next and when it's coming off, and then pack up your things, shake the dust of Portriga off your boots (if you still wear boots) and come home to

Your friend and partner,

TONY.

"That's very nice," said Molly critically. "I had no idea you could write such a good letter."

"Nor had I," said Tony. "I am always surprising myself with my own talents."

There was a short pause.

"What's Jimmy like?" asked Molly.

Tony addressed the envelope and proceeded to fasten it up. "He is quite charming," he said. "He is chubby and round, and he talks in a little gentle whisper like a small child. He can drink fourteen whiskies without turning a hair, and I don't believe he has ever lost his temper in his life."

"He sounds a dear," said Molly. "I wonder you let him go."

"I couldn't help it," said Tony sadly. "He has some extraordinary objection to borrowing from his friends, and he owed so much to everyone else that he had to go away."

"I wonder if he will answer the letter," said Molly.

Tony got up with the envelope in his hand. "You can be sure of that. Jimmy always answers letters. We shall hear from him in less than a week and I'll come round and see you at once." He looked at his watch. "I am afraid I must be off now, Molly. I have a very important engagement with a bishop."

"Rot," returned Molly. "Bishops never get up till the middle of the day."

"This one does," said Tony. "He suffers from insomnia."

Molly laughed, and putting her hands on his shoulders, stood up on tip-toe and kissed him.

"Well, don't tell him about that," she said, "or he might be jealous."

It was exactly on the stroke of twelve as Tony's car swung in again through the gate of Goodman's Rest, and came to a standstill outside the front door.

Leaving it where it was, he walked into the hall and rang the bell, which was answered almost immediately by Spalding.

"Has Miss Francis arrived yet?" he asked.

Spalding inclined his head. "Yes, Sir Antony. She is in the garden." He paused. "Mr. Oliver is with her," he added.

Tony looked up in some surprise. "Mr. Oliver!" he repeated. "What's he doing?"

"I heard him say he would show her the ranunculi, sir," explained Spalding impassively.

Tony turned towards the study, the window of which opened out on to the lawn. The thought of Isabel at the solitary mercy of Guy filled him with sudden concern. The latter had evidently changed his mind about seeing her, and had doubtless taken her into the garden to express the disapproval he had so sternly enunciated that morning.

Reaching the French window, however, Tony came to a sudden halt. The sight that met his eyes was, under the circumstances, a distinctly arresting one. Half-way down the lawn was a small almond tree, its slender branches just then a delicate tracery of pink and white loveliness. Guy and Isabel were standing in front of this in an attitude which suggested anything but the conclusion of a strained and painful

interview. Isabel was looking up at the blossoms with her lips parted in a smile of sheer delight. A few paces off, Guy was watching her with an expression of earnest admiration almost as striking as that which she was wasting upon the almond tree.

For perhaps a couple of seconds, Tony stood motionless taking in the unexpected tableau. Then with a faint chuckle he pulled out his case and thoughtfully lighted himself a cigarette.

As he did so, Guy stepped forward to the tree, and breaking off a little cluster of blossom rather clumsily offered it to Isabel. She took the gift with a graceful little gesture, like that of a princess accepting the natural homage of a subject, and smiling her thanks as Guy proceeded to fasten it in her dress.

It seemed to Tony that this was a very favourable moment for making his appearance. He opened the glass door, and walking down the steps, sauntered quietly towards them across the lawn.

They both heard him at the same instant, and turned quickly round. Isabel gave a little exclamation of pleased surprise, while Guy's face assumed a sudden expression of embarrassment that filled Tony with delight. He looked at them gravely for a moment, and then lifting up Isabel's hand lightly kissed the pink tip of one of her fingers.

"Good-morning, Cousin Isabel," he said. "I am sorry to be late. I hope Guy hasn't been unkind to you."

"Unkind!" repeated Isabel, opening her eyes. "Why he has been charming. He has been showing

me the garden." She looked across at Guy with that frank, curiously attractive smile of hers. "I don't think we have quarrelled once, have we, Mr. Guy?"

"Certainly not," said Guy with what seemed unnecessary warmth.

"I am so glad," observed Tony contentedly. "It always distresses me when relations can't get on together." He let go Isabel's hand and looked at his watch. "How do you feel about a run in the car?" he inquired. "It's just ten minutes past twelve now, and we could get to Cookham comfortably for lunch by one o'clock."

"I should love it," said Isabel gaily. "I don't know in the least where Cookham is, but it sounds a splendid place to lunch at."

Tony looked at her with approval. "I am glad you like making bad puns, Isabel," he said. "It's a sure sign of a healthy and intelligent mind."

He led the way round to the front of the house, where they found the Hispano-Suiza still decorating the drive, with Jennings bending over the open bonnet. The chauffeur looked up and grudgingly touched his cap as they approached.

"Came down to see if you would be wanting either of the other cars," he observed.

"What do you think, Isabel?" inquired Tony. "Will this do, or would you rather have something more comfortable?"

She glanced with admiration over the tapering lines of the slim racing body. "Oh, let's have this one," she said. "I love to go fast."

Guy gave a slight shudder. "For goodness' sake don't say that to Tony. It's a direct encouragement to suicide."

Isabel laughed cheerfully. She seemed quite a different person from the highly strung, frightened girl whom Tony had rescued in Long Acre.

She buttoned her coat, and stepped lightly into the seat alongside of Tony, who had already taken his place at the wheel.

"As a matter of cold truth," he observed, "I am a very careful driver. If there's likely to be trouble I never run any unnecessary risks, do I, Jennings?"

"I can't say, sir," replied Jennings sourly. "I always shuts me eyes."

Isabel laughed again and settling herself comfortably back in the seat, waved her hand to Guy as the car slid off down the drive.

Tony always drove well, but like most good drivers he had his particular days. This was certainly one of them. During the earlier part of the journey, from Hampstead to Hammersmith, his progress verged upon the miraculous. The Hispano glided in and out of the traffic like some slim white première danseuse threading her way through the mazes of a ballet, the applause of an audience being supplied by the occasional compliments from startled bus-drivers which floated after them through the receding air.

Isabel seemed to enjoy it all immensely. She had evidently spoken the truth when she said she

was not nervous "in that way," for the most hair-breadth escapes failed to disturb her serenity. She had the good sense not to talk much until they were clear of the worst part of the traffic, but after that she chatted away to Tony with practically no trace of the embarrassment and shyness that she had hitherto displayed. Whatever her mysterious troubles might be, she seemed for the time to have succeeded in throwing them off her mind.

There being no particular hurry, and thinking that Isabel would enjoy the drive, Tony did not take the direct road for Maidenhead. He crossed Hammersmith Bridge and turned off into Richmond Park, which just then was in all the fresh green beauty of its new spring costume.

They were three-quarters of the way through and were rapidly approaching the town, when quite suddenly Isabel, who up till then had apparently been taking little notice of where they were going, broke off abruptly in the middle of what she was saying.

"Why!" she stammered; "isn't—isn't this Richmond Park?"

Tony looked at her in mild surprise. "Yes," he said. "I came round this way for the sake of the run." He paused. "What's the matter?" he added, for all the colour and animation had died out of her face.

"I—I'd rather not go through Richmond," she faltered, "if—if it's all the same to you."

Tony slackened down the pace to a mere crawl.

"Why of course," he said. "We will do exactly what you like. I didn't know——"

The sentence was never finished. With a sudden little gasp Isabel shrank back in the car, cowering against him almost as if she had been struck.

The cause of her alarm was not difficult to discover. A well-dressed elderly man who had been walking slowly towards them with his head down, had suddenly pulled up in the roadway and was staring at her in a sort of incredulous amazement. Although Tony had only seen him once before, he recognized him immediately. It was the agitated gentleman who had been talking to Da Freitas in the hall of the Club on the previous morning.

For perhaps a second he remained planted in the road apparently paralysed with amazement: then with a sudden hoarse exclamation of "Isabella!" he took a swift stride towards the car.

Isabel clutched Tony by the arm.

"Go on," she whispered faintly.

"Stop, sir!" bellowed the stranger, and with surprising agility for one of his age and dignified appearance, he hopped upon the step and caught hold of the door.

Tony didn't wait for any further instructions. Freeing his arm quietly from Isabel he leaned across the car, and with a sudden swift thrust in the chest sent the intruder sprawling in the roadway.

At the same moment he jammed on the accelerator, and the well-trained Hispano leaped forward like a greyhound from its leash.

CHAPTER IX

A RUN-AWAY QUEEN

A MORBID regard for the exact speed limit was never one of Tony's failings, and he covered the short distance that separated them from the end of the park in what was probably a record time for that respectable stretch of fairway.

He slackened down a little on reaching the gates, but as luck would have it there was no one about to obstruct his progress, and in a graceful curve he swept out on to the main road.

Then with a laugh he turned to Isabel.

"I love going about with you, Isabel," he said. "One never knows what's going to happen next."

She made no answer, but rising slightly in her seat cast a quick, frightened glance over her shoulder as if to see whether they were being followed.

"It's quite all right," went on Tony comfortingly. "I don't know who your friend is, but we shan't be seeing him again to-day."

"That," said Isabel faintly—"that was my uncle."

"Really!" said Tony. "He seems very impulsive."

He paused for a moment while the Hispano neatly

negotiated a rather dazzled-looking cluster of pedestrians, and then turning again to his companion he added consolingly: "Don't let it worry you, Isabel. Lots of charming people have eccentric uncles."

She made a little protesting gesture with her hands. "Oh, no, no," she said almost piteously, "I can't go on like this. I must tell you the whole truth. I ought to have done so right at the beginning."

"Just as you like," replied Tony, "but hadn't we better wait till we have had some food. It's so much easier to tell the truth after a good meal."

She nodded rather forlornly, and without wasting any further discussion on the matter, Tony turned away to the right and headed off in the direction of Cookham. He continued to talk away to Isabel in his easy, unruffled fashion exactly as if nothing unusual had occurred, and by the end of the first mile or so she had pulled herself together sufficiently to answer him back with quite a passable imitation of her former good spirits. All the same it was easy to see that underneath this apparent cheerfulness she was in almost as nervous a state as when he had first met her in Long Acre.

They reached Cookham, and slowing down as the car entered its pleasant, straggling main street, Tony turned into the courtyard of the Dragon. A large, sombre-looking dog attached to a chain greeted his appearance with vociferous approval; a welcome which, in spirit at all events, was handsomely seconded by the smiling proprietress, who a moment

later made her appearance through the side door. Tony was distinctly popular at riverside hotels.

"How do you do, Miss Brown?" he said.

"Very well, thank you, Sir Antony," she replied.

"And you, sir? Lie down."

The latter observation was addressed to the dog.

"I am suffering from hunger," observed Tony.

"Do you think you can make any nice suggestion about lunch?"

The landlady paused reflectively.

"I can give you," she said, "some trout, a roast duckling, and marrow on toast."

Tony looked at her for a moment in speechless admiration. "My dear Miss Brown," he said, "that isn't a suggestion. That's an outburst of poetry." He turned to Isabel apologetically. "Roast duckling," he explained, "is one of the few things that make me really excited."

She laughed—a little gay, frank, natural laugh that Tony was delighted to hear. "I think all men are greedy," she said. "At least all the men I've ever known have been."

Tony nodded. "It's one of the original instincts of humanity," he observed thoughtfully. "We have to be greedy in self-defence. A man who isn't is bound to be beaten by a man who is. It's what Darwin calls the survival of the fittest." He turned back to the landlady who had been listening to him with a placid smile. "Send us a couple of cocktails into the dining-room, will you, Miss

Brown," he said. "It would be wicked to rush at a lunch like that without any preparation."

All through the meal, which was served in a pleasant room looking out into a quaint old courtyard garden at the back, Tony kept the conversation in the same strain of impersonal philosophy. It was not until the marrow on toast had gone the way of all beautiful earthly things that he made any reference to Isabel's promised revelation.

"What do you say to having coffee outside?" he suggested. "There's a nice place where we can sit in the sun and you can tell me about your uncle. One should never discuss one's relations in a public dining-room."

Isabel contented herself with a nod, and after giving their instructions to the waiter, they strolled out through the open French window, and made their way to a rustic bench at the farther end of the garden.

It was a delightfully warm, peaceful spring day, and the perfume of the hyacinths and daffodils that were in full bloom almost overpowered the slight odour of petrol from the neighbouring garage.

"It's a curious coincidence," observed Tony, as the waiter retired after placing their coffee on a small table beside them, "but as a matter of fact I feel in exactly the right frame of mind for listening to the truth. I expect it's that bottle of burgundy we had."

He struck a match and held it out to Isabel, who,

bending forward, lighted the cigarette which she had been twisting about between her fingers.

"It's—it's dreadfully difficult to tell things," she said, sitting up and looking at him rather helplessly. "I haven't the least notion how to begin."

"Of course it's difficult," said Tony. "Nothing requires so much practice as telling the truth. It's against every civilized impulse in human nature." He paused. "Suppose we try the catechism idea for a start. I ask you 'what is your name?' and you say 'Isabel Francis.'"

She shook her head. "But—but it isn't," she faltered. "It's—it's Isabella, and there are about eight other names after it."

Tony looked at her in surprise. "Why that's exactly the complaint I am suffering from. I thought it was peculiar to baronets and superfluous people of that sort."

"Well, the fact is," began Isabel; then she stopped. "Oh, I know it sounds too utterly silly," she went on with a sort of hurried desperation, "but you see the fact is I—I'm a queen."

She brought out the last three words as if she were confessing some peculiarly shameful family secret.

Tony slowly removed his cigarette from his lips.

"A *what*?" he inquired.

"Well, not exactly a queen," said Isabel, correcting herself hastily. "In a way I am, you know. I mean I ought to be. At least that's what they say." She broke off in a charming confusion that made her look prettier than ever.

Tony leaned back in the seat and contemplated her with deep enjoyment.

"You grow more perfect every minute, Cousin Isabel," he said. "Don't hurry yourself, but just tell me quite slowly and deliberately who you really are."

Isabel took a long breath. "My father was Don Francisco of Livadia, and some people say I ought to be the queen."

Tony was not easily surprised, but for once in his life he sat up as if he had been struck by an electric shock. Even his trusty powers of speech were temporarily numbed.

He had of course heard of Don Francisco—that persistent gentleman who for twenty years had indulged in spasmodic and ineffectual efforts to wrest the throne of Livadia from Pedro's father. But that Isabel should be his daughter, and what was more the apparently recognized heir to his royal claims, was one of those staggering surprises for which the English language contains no adequate comment.

For a moment he remained gazing at her in the blankest astonishment; then the full humour of the situation suddenly came home to him, and he broke into a long chuckle of delighted amusement.

Isabel watched him sympathetically out of her amber eyes.

"It's quite true," she said. "I know it sounds absurd, but it's quite true."

"I don't think it's the least absurd," said Tony, who had now completely recovered his normal com-

posure. "I think it's the most beautifully reasonable thing that's ever happened. Of course you are a queen, or ought to be a queen. I felt that the moment I met you." He paused, and taking out his case lighted himself a fresh cigarette. "It was the Livadian part of the business that knocked me out so completely," he explained.

Isabel nodded her head. "I know," she said. "I heard you say that you knew Pedro and Da Freitas. That was one of the things that made me feel I ought to tell you."

"It only shows," remarked Tony with quiet satisfaction, "that the Early Christian Fathers were quite right. If one has faith and patience one generally gets what one wants sooner or later. All my life I have had a secret craving to be mixed up in some really high-class conspiracy; with kings and queens and bombs and wonderful mysterious people crawling about trying to assassinate each other. I was just beginning to be afraid that all that kind of thing was extinct." He drew in a long mouthful of smoke, and let it filter out luxuriously into the still, warm air. "How very fortunate I happened to be in Long Acre, wasn't it?"

"I am so glad you feel like that," said Isabel happily. "I was afraid you wouldn't want to help me any more when you knew all about it."

"But I don't know all about it yet," objected Tony. "Hadn't you better begin right at the beginning and tell me everything?"

For a moment Isabel hesitated.

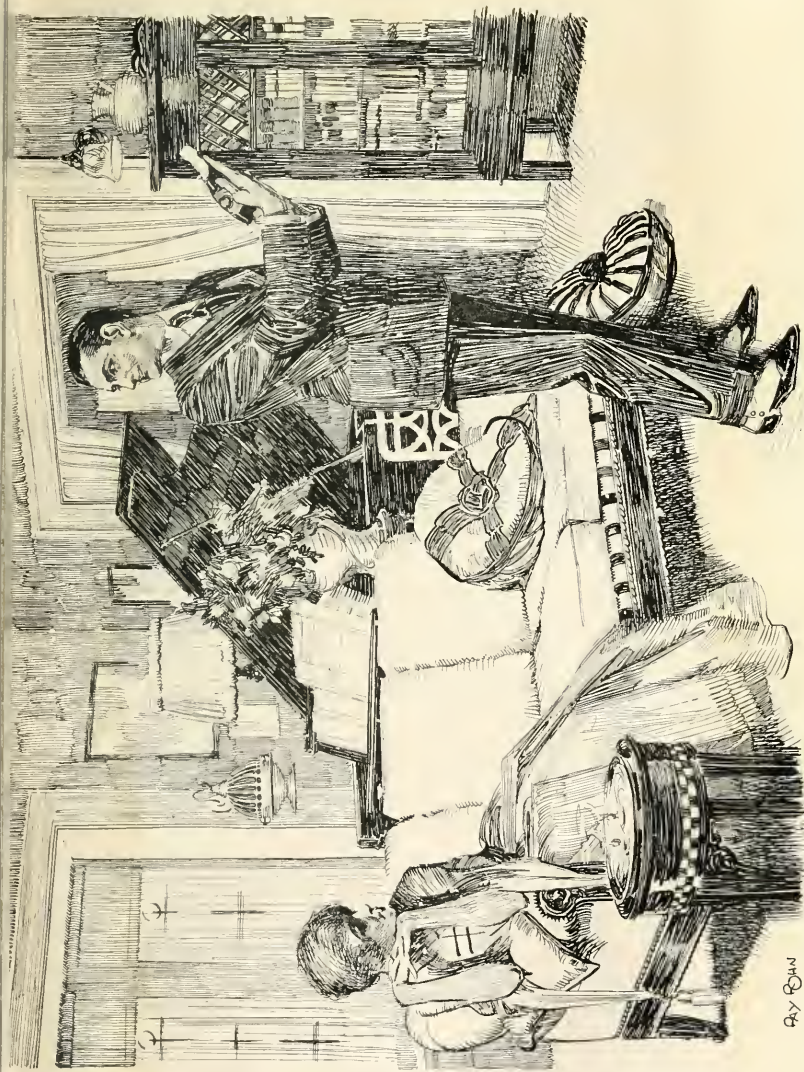
"Well," she said slowly. "I suppose that what you would call the beginning—the real beginning—was a long time before I was born. You see my grandfather always had an idea that he ought to be king of Livadia, because he said there was something wrong about somebody's marriage or something back in sixteen hundred and fifty—at least I think that was the date."

"It was a very careless century," said Tony.

"He didn't bother much about it himself," went on Isabel, "because he hated Livadia and liked to live in Paris or London. Besides I think they made him an allowance to keep out of the country. Father was quite different. He always wanted to be a king, and directly my grandfather died, he started doing everything he could to get what he called 'his rights.'"

"I can never understand any intelligent man wanting to be a king," observed Tony thoughtfully. "One would have to associate entirely with successful people, and they are always so horribly busy and conceited."

"But father wasn't intelligent," explained Isabel, "not in the least little bit. He was just obstinate. He was quite certain he ought to be a king, and you know when you are quite certain about a thing yourself, however silly it is, there are always lots of others who will agree with you." She paused. "Besides," she went on, "after the old King died and Pedro's father came to the throne, things were quite different in Livadia. The taxes went on going up



Ray Bow

Tony looked at the labels, "And do you mean to say," he remarked a little reproachfully, "that you really waste this on dramatic critics?"

"I give them the choice," said Molly gravely. "They can either have that, or hold my hand. So far, they have always chosen the champagne."

and up, and the country kept on getting poorer and poorer, until at last a certain number of people began to wonder whether it wouldn't be better to have a change. I don't think they thought much of father. I suppose they just felt he couldn't be worse anyhow."

"I like your historical sense, Isabel," observed Tony. "It's so free from prejudice."

Isabel accepted the compliment with perfect simplicity. "You see I knew father," she said frankly. "He would have made a very bad king; he was always getting intoxicated."

Tony nodded. "Nearly all exiled monarchs are addicted to drink. They find it necessary to keep up their enthusiasm."

"But it wasn't only a question of drinking in father's case," went on Isabel. "People wouldn't have minded that very much; you see they are so used to it in Livadia. It was the way he quarrelled with everyone afterwards that spoilt his chances. At one time he had almost as big a following as the King, but after a bit most of them gave him up as hopeless. Then someone started the idea of a Republic. It was quite a small party at first, but people drifted into it gradually from both sides until in the end it was the strongest of the three. Father wouldn't give up for a long time. He was a frightfully obstinate man, and I don't think he knew what it meant to be afraid. That was one of his best points. He kept on until nearly everyone who stuck to him had been killed, and then at last he got badly

wounded himself, and only just managed to escape over the frontier."

"And what were you doing all this crowded time?" inquired Tony.

"I," said Isabel, "oh, I was living in Paris with my governess, Miss Watson."

"What—the missing lady of Long Acre?"

Isabel nodded. "She looked after me for fifteen years. You see, father had spent a good deal of time in London when he was young, and he always said that English women were the only ones you could trust because they were so cold. So when my mother died, he engaged Miss Watson and put me in her charge altogether."

"Judging by the results," observed Tony, "it seems to have been a happy choice."

"She's a dear," said Isabel with enthusiasm, "an absolute dear. I don't know what I should have been like without her, because father always insisted on his own people treating me as if I was a real princess, and we never saw any one else. If it hadn't been for her, I should probably have believed everything they told me." She paused for a moment as though reflecting on this narrow but fortunate escape, and then straightening herself in the seat, she added: "I was really quite happy until Uncle Philip sent her away."

"Is Uncle Philip our impetuous friend of Richmond Park?" inquired Tony.

"That's him," said Isabel, with a queenly disregard for grammar. "He is my mother's brother,

and his real name is the Count de Sé. He came to live with us in Paris after father was wounded. He is a nasty, mean, hateful sort of man, but father liked him because he was the only person left who treated him like a king. Poor father was nearly always drunk in those days, and I don't think he really knew what he was doing. Uncle Philip used to talk to him and flatter him and all that sort of thing, and at last he got father to make a will appointing him as my guardian. The very first thing he did, as soon as father died, was to send away Miss Watson."

"I don't think I like Uncle Philip," said Tony. "I am glad I pushed him off the car."

"So am I," said Isabel with surprising viciousness. "I only hope he hurt himself. He did fall in the road, didn't he?" she added anxiously.

"I think so," said Tony. "It sounded like it anyway."

"I can't help feeling horrid about him," she went on. "It is all his fault that any of this has happened."

"I am glad to hear something in his favour," said Tony.

"Oh, I don't mean my being here and knowing you. I love that part of it. I mean Richmond and Pedro and Da Freitas, and—and—oh, all the hateful, ghastly time I have had the last month."

She broke off with a slight shiver, as though the very memory were physically unpleasant. Tony smoked his cigarette in sympathetic silence until she felt ready to continue.

"You see," she began, "after Miss Watson was

sent away there was no one to help me at all. Uncle Philip wouldn't let me have any money, and the only person I could talk to was a horrible old French-woman who spied on me all the time like a cat. I had a year of that, and then one day Uncle Philip told me that he had taken a house for us at Richmond in England, and that we were going over to live there at once. I didn't mind. Anything seemed better than Paris, and of course I had no idea what his real plans were."

There was a short pause.

"It didn't take me long to find out," she went on bitterly. "The day after we arrived, I was sitting in the drawing-room when who should come in but Uncle Philip and the Marquis da Freitas. You can imagine how astonished I was when Uncle introduced him. Of course I had always been brought up to look on him as the worst enemy we had. Well, he bowed and he smiled and he paid me a lot of compliments, and then he said that now Livadia was a republic it was only right that the two branches of the royal family should be friends. He kept on telling me how anxious King Pedro was to make my acquaintance, and at last it came out that he and the King were living in Richmond and that we were invited over to dinner the next night.

"Even then," she continued slowly, "I didn't guess what was behind it all. It was only when he was gone and I was alone with Uncle that I found out the truth."

She paused.

"Yes?" said Tony.

Isabel took another long breath.

"They had arranged for a marriage between me and Pedro, and it was to come off in a couple of months."

A low surprised whistle broke from Tony's lips.

"By Jove!" he said softly. "By Jove!"

For a moment he remained contemplating Isabel with a sort of grave enjoyment; then abandoning his cigarette he sat up straight in the seat.

"This," he observed, "is undoubtedly a case of predestination. It must have been arranged millions of years ago that I should be in Long Acre on that particular evening."

"Perhaps it was," said Isabel. "Anyway I shouldn't have married Pedro whatever happened. I made up my mind about that the first time I saw him."

"Did you tell him?" asked Tony.

"I told Uncle Philip as soon as we got home. Of course he was very angry, but I don't think he took me seriously. He just said it didn't make any difference—that whether I liked it or not I should have to be married, so I had better get used to the idea as quickly as possible."

Tony nodded his head thoughtfully.

"It all fits in perfectly except one thing," he said. "I can't quite see what your uncle and Da Freitas hope to get out of it. They must both have some notion at the back of their beautiful heads."

"That's what I don't understand," said Isabel in a

puzzled voice. "Anyhow it's all their arrangement. Pedro doesn't want to marry me really—not a little bit. He is only doing it because Da Freitas tells him to." She hesitated. "If it hadn't been for that I couldn't have stood it as long as I did."

"How long was it?" asked Tony sympathetically.

"Just three weeks. The day after that first dinner Da Freitas came over again, and made a sort of formal proposal. I told him quite plainly I wouldn't, but it didn't make any difference. Uncle Philip declared that I was shy, and didn't know what I was talking about, and Da Freitas said in his horrid oily way that he was quite sure when I got to know Pedro better I would love him as much as he loved me. I saw it was no good saying anything else, so I just made up my mind I would run away."

Tony looked at her approvingly. "You are extraordinarily practical," he said, "for the daughter of an exiled monarch."

"There was nothing else to do," replied Isabel; "but it wasn't easy. You see I had no money and Uncle never let me go out alone. Wherever I went I always had Suzanne the old Frenchwoman with me. The only person I could think of who might be able to help me was Miss Watson. When she left she had given me her address in London, and I knew she would do anything she could because she hated Uncle Philip almost as much as I did. I wrote her a little note and carried it about with me in my dress for days, but I never got a chance to post it. Well, things went on like that till last Monday. I

was feeling hateful, because Pedro had been to dinner the night before, and I think he'd had too much to drink. Anyhow he had wanted to kiss me afterwards, and there had been a frightful row, and everyone had been perfectly horrid to me. In the morning Uncle started again. He told me that he and the Marquis da Freitas had decided to put a stop to what he called my 'nonsense,' and that they were making arrangements for me and Pedro to be married immediately. I felt miserable, but I wasn't going to argue any more about it, so I just said nothing. He went over there about half-past six in the evening and I was left alone in the house with Suzanne. They wouldn't trust me to be by myself at all, except at night, when I was always locked in my bedroom."

She stopped to push back a rebellious copper-coloured curl which had temporarily escaped over her forehead.

"We were sitting in the drawing-room," she went on, "and Suzanne was knitting, and I was supposed to be reading a book. I wasn't really, because I was too miserable to think about anything. I was just sitting doing nothing when I happened to look up, and there I saw half-a-crown on the writing-desk opposite. I suppose it must have been Suzanne's. Well, I looked at it for a moment, and then all of a sudden I made up my mind. I got up out of the chair, and walked across the room as if I was going to get something fresh to read. As I passed the desk I picked up the half-crown. I had a horrible feeling

in my back that Suzanne was watching me, but I didn't look round till I got to the book-case, and then I saw that she was still knitting away quite peacefully and happily. I didn't wait any longer. I just walked straight on to the door, and before she knew what was happening, I had slipped out on to the landing and locked her in."

"Splendid!" said Tony with enthusiasm. "I can almost hear her gnashing her teeth."

"She *was* rather angry," admitted Isabel, "but I didn't pay any attention to her. I knew that no one could hear, so I left her to shout and kick the door and ran straight up to my room. I was too excited to bother much about what I took with me. I just stuffed a few things in my bag, and then I crept downstairs again, and got out of the house as quick as ever I could."

"Did you feel afraid?" asked Tony.

"Not till I got to the station. Then I found I had ten minutes to wait for a train and that was awful. I kept on thinking Uncle Philip would turn up every moment. I stopped in the ladies' waiting-room as long as I could, and then I made a dash for the platform and jumped into the first carriage I came to. It was full of old women, and they all stared at me as if I was mad. I felt horribly red and uncomfortable, but I wasn't going to get out again, so I just squeezed into a seat and shut my eyes and let them stare."

"You mustn't blame them," said Tony. "It's the special privilege of cats to scrutinize Royalty."

"Oh, I didn't mind really. I am sort of accustomed to it. People used to stare at me in France when I went in a train. I expect it's my red hair." She paused. "All the same I *was* glad when we got to Waterloo. I was so excited I could hardly breathe till I was past the barrier, and then I nearly collapsed. I know now just how an animal feels when he gets out of a trap." She turned to Tony. "You don't think I'm an awful coward, do you?"

"I think you are as brave as a lion," said Tony.

"I didn't feel it then," she answered. "I was trembling all over and my heart was thumping like anything. I sat down on a seat for a minute, and then I thought I would go into the refreshment room and have a cup of tea. You see I had come away without any dinner."

"You poor dear!" said Tony feelingly. "Of course you had!"

"Well, I got up from the seat, and I was just looking round to see where the refreshment room was, when I suddenly caught sight of two men staring at me like anything."

"What—not our two comic opera pals?" exclaimed Tony.

Isabel nodded emphatically. "Yes," she said, "that's who it was. They were standing over by the bookstall talking together. They turned away directly I looked at them, but I knew perfectly well they were watching me. I had never seen either of them before and it made me feel horribly frightened again. I thought that perhaps Uncle had telephoned

up to London, and that they were two policemen who had come to fetch me back."

"You can always tell an English policeman when he is in plain clothes," interrupted Tony. "He looks so fearfully ashamed of himself."

"I didn't know," said Isabel. "I was too upset to think much, and when they came after me into the refreshment room I could simply have screamed. I thought they were going to speak to me then, but they didn't. They just sat there while I had my tea, and then followed me out on to the platform. I asked a porter what was the best way to get to Long Acre, and he told me to take the tube to Leicester Square. I hoped and hoped I'd manage to lose them, but it was no good. They came along in the same carriage and got out at Leicester Square, too."

"I wish I'd been with you," said Tony regretfully. "I have never been traced or shadowed or anything like that. It must be a wonderful feeling."

"It was awful in the lift," said Isabel. "I hadn't the least notion which way to go when I got out, and I felt certain they would come up and speak to me. I was so desperate that just as the lift stopped I turned round to the lady who was standing next me and asked her if she could show me the way to Long Acre. You can imagine how pleased I was when she said she was going in that direction and I could walk along with her."

"I suppose they crept stealthily after you," said Tony. "People always do that in books when they are shadowing anybody."

"I suppose they did," said Isabel. "I was much too frightened to look round. I just walked along with the lady till we got to the door of the flats, and then I thanked her very much and ran upstairs as fast as I could. Miss Watson's number was right at the top of the building. There was no bell, so I hammered on the knocker, and then I stood there panting and trying to get my breath, and thinking every moment I should hear them coming up the stairs after me.

"Well, I stood there and stood there, and nothing happened, and then suddenly it came to me as if—oh, just as if somebody had dropped a lump of ice down inside my dress. Suppose Miss Watson had left! You see I had been so excited about getting away from Richmond I had never thought of that. For a second it made me feel quite ill; then I grabbed hold of the knocker, and I was just beginning to hammer again, when the door of the opposite flat opened and an old gentleman came out on to the landing. He was a fat, cross-looking old man, with spectacles and carpet slippers, and a newspaper in his hand. He said to me: 'It's no good making that horrible noise. Miss Watson has gone away for a month, and there's no one in the place.' Then he banged the door and went back into the flat."

"Dyspeptic old brute," observed Tony. "I hope you went on hammering."

"What was the good?" said Isabel with a little despairing gesture. "I knew he was speaking the truth because I had already made enough noise to

wake up twenty people. Besides I seemed to have gone all sort of numbed and stupid. I had so counted on finding Miss Watson I had never even begun to think what would happen if she wasn't there."

"It must have been a shattering blow," said Tony. "I think I should have burst into tears."

"I couldn't cry; I was too dazed and miserable. I just leaned where I was against the wall and wondered what on earth I was to do next. The only thing I could think of was to go to a hotel. I had no money, except what was left out of the half-crown, but I had got my rings and I knew I could sell them the next day. It was the two men outside that I was so frightened of. I felt certain they were policemen, and that if I went anywhere they would be sure to follow me and then telegraph to Uncle Philip where I was.

"I don't know how long I stayed on the landing. It seemed an age, but I expect it was only about half an hour really. I thought that perhaps if I stopped there long enough they might get tired of waiting and go away.

"At last I began to feel so cold and hungry and tired I simply couldn't stand it any longer. I came downstairs again as far as the hall, and then I walked across to the door and looked out into the street. I couldn't see a sign of anybody waiting about, so I just sort of set my teeth and stepped out on to the pavement. I stood there for a second wondering which way to go, and then almost before I knew what was

happening there I was with my back against the wall, and those two horrible men in front of me."

She paused with a little reminiscent gasp.

"And the rest of the acts of Isabel and all that she did," began Tony; then he broke off with a laugh. "What was it our squint-eyed friend was actually saying to you?" he asked.

"It wasn't so much what he said," answered Isabel; "it was what he said it in. He spoke to me in Livadian."

Tony nodded composedly. "I thought so," he observed.

"He said: 'Don't be frightened, Madam; we are your friends.' At least I think it was that. I was too upset to listen to him properly; and the next moment you came." She drew in a long breath. "Oh, I was pleased," she added simply.

"So was I," said Tony, "and so was Bugg. In fact I think we were all pleased except your friends." He paused. "Are you quite sure you hadn't seen either of them before?"

Isabel nodded. "Quite," she said. "I never forget faces; especially faces like that."

"They *are* the sort that would linger in one's memory," said Tony. He got up from the seat and stood for a moment with his hands in his side-pockets looking thoughtfully down at Isabel.

"Now you know everything," she began hesitatingly. "Are you—are you still certain you wouldn't like me to go away?"

"Go away!" repeated Tony. "My incomparable cousin, what are you talking about?"

"But just think," she pleaded. "It may mean all sorts of trouble. I don't know who those two men are or what they want, but I've got a sort of horrible feeling they will find me out again somehow. And then there's my uncle and Da Freitas." She gave a little shiver. "Oh, you don't know Da Freitas as I do. There's nothing **he** will stop at to get me back—absolutely nothing."

Tony smiled happily. "I quite believe you," he said. "I should think he was a most unscrupulous brute. People with those smooth purry voices always are." Then with that sudden infectious laugh he took his hands from his pockets and held them out to Isabel, who after a momentary hesitation put out her own to meet them. "My dear Isabel," he said, almost seriously; "haven't you grasped the great fact that this is the most colossal jest ever arranged by Providence? I should see it through to the end if I had to get up to breakfast every day for the rest of my life." He paused with a twinkle in his eyes. "Unless, of course, you really want to be Queen of Livadia."

"Me!" exclaimed Isabel, with the same fine disregard for grammar. "Why, I never want to see the hateful place again. There's nothing I would love better than just to stay with you—I mean of course," she added hastily, "until Miss Watson comes back."

"Of course," said Tony.

Then suddenly releasing her hands, Isabel too got up from the seat.

"It's only that I don't want to be a trouble or—or an expense," she added a little confusedly.

"As far as the expense goes," said Tony, "the matter is already settled. I have consulted one of the most eminent pawnbrokers in London, and he tells me that your great-grandmother had a very pretty taste in jewellery. There will be no need to pawn the rings. He let me have seven thousand pounds on the brooch alone."

"Seven thousand pounds," echoed Isabel with a gasp. "Oh, but how lovely! I can live on that for ever." She hesitated for a moment. "They are part of the Royal collection you know. Pedro gave them to me when we were betrothed—at least I don't suppose he really meant me to keep them."

Tony laughed joyously. "What fun!" he exclaimed. "I should love to have seen Da Freitas' face when he heard you had taken them with you. Though as a matter of fact," he added, "we shall probably see it quite soon enough, unless Uncle Phil was too agitated to recognize me."

"Recognize *you*?" repeated Isabel, opening her eyes. "Why he has never seen you before this morning!"

"Yes, he has," said Tony. "I happened to be in the hall of the Club yesterday, when he came rushing in to tell Da Freitas that you had disappeared. At least I imagine that was what he came for. He

could hardly have been so beautifully excited about anything else."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Isabel in dismay. "Then if he saw you in the car he will be able to find out who you are from Da Freitas."

Tony nodded. "One can't have all the trumps," he observed philosophically. "It would be an awfully dull game if one did."

There was a second's pause. Then with a sudden impulsive gesture Isabel clasped her hands together in front of her.

"I don't care," she remarked defiantly. "I'm not frightened of them. I don't believe I shall be frightened of anything—not with you to help me."

CHAPTER X

THE ROYAL ENTERPRISE

THE mellow-toned grandfather clock in the corner chimed out the stroke of nine-thirty as Guy crossed the hall with a bundle of papers in his hand. He had reached the foot of the banisters and was preparing to ascend, when his progress was brought to a sudden standstill.

Coming down the broad oak staircase, with the inevitable cigarette between his lips, was the smiling and fully dressed figure of Sir Antony Conway.

Guy stared at him incredulously.

"Good gracious, Tony!" he observed. "Do you mean to say you have got up to breakfast two days running?"

"I have," said Tony with some dignity. "As the prospective member for Balham North, I feel it's my duty to be thoroughly English." He reached the bottom of the stairs and slipped his arm through his cousin's. "I have told Spalding that I will have porridge, eggs and bacon, marmalade, and a copy of the *Times*," he added. "Come along into the study and help me to face them."

"Well, I am pretty busy this morning," said Guy,

"but I would sacrifice a good deal for the sake of seeing you reading the *Times* and eating a proper healthy breakfast."

"Oh, I don't suppose I shall go as far as that," said Tony. "I shall probably only look at them. There is no point in carrying things to extremes."

He pushed open the door of the study, where they discovered Spalding in the act of putting the finishing touches to a charmingly appointed breakfast table.

With a final glance of approval at his handiwork, that well-trained servitor stepped back and pulled out a chair for Tony.

"Is everything ready?" inquired the latter.

"Quite ready, Sir Antony," replied Spalding. "The copy of the *Times* is beside your plate, sir. You will find the engineering supplement inside."

He brought up another chair for Guy, and then retiring to a small electric lift in the wall, produced the eggs and bacon and porridge which he placed on the sideboard upon a couple of carefully trimmed and already lighted spirit stoves.

"You needn't wait, Spalding," said Tony. "I like to help myself at breakfast; it's more in keeping with the best English traditions."

Spalding bowed, and crossing to the door closed it noiselessly behind him.

Tony began leisurely to pour himself out a cup of tea.

"I suppose you have had your breakfast, Guy?" he observed.

The latter nodded. "I have," he said, "but if you

are going to keep up this excellent habit of early rising, I shall wait for you in future."

"Yes, do," said Tony. "Then we can read out the best bits in the *Times* to each other. Henry and Laura do it every morning at breakfast." He took a sip out of the cup and lighted himself a fresh cigarette. "By the way," he added. "I am going to meet them at lunch to-day."

"Where?" inquired Guy.

"At Aunt Fanny's. She sent me a sort of S.O.S. call this morning saying that they were coming and imploring help. I can't leave her alone with them. She is getting too old for really hard work."

"I believe Aunt Fanny deliberately encourages you to laugh at them," said Guy severely.

"I don't want any encouragement," protested Tony, helping himself to a delicately browned piece of toast.

"If I didn't laugh at Laura I should weep."

"You would do much better if you listened a bit more to what they said. But of course it's no use offering you any advice."

"Oh, yes, it is," said Tony. "That's where you wrong me." He leaned back in his chair and looked mischievously across at his cousin. "I pay the most careful attention to everything you tell me, Guy. At the present moment I am seriously thinking of following some advice you gave me yesterday."

"What about?" asked Guy suspiciously.

Tony broke off a little piece of toast and crunched it thoughtfully between his teeth.

"About Cousin Isabel," he replied.

Something remarkably like a faint flush of colour mounted into Guy's face.

"Really!" he observed with an admirable indifference.

Tony nodded gently. "Certain things which have come to my knowledge since have made me feel that perhaps you were right in what you said. I doubt whether I should be justified in risking my political career for the sake of a passing whim. After all one has to think of the country."

Guy looked at him with mistrust. "You don't suppose I shall swallow that," he observed.

"It doesn't matter," said Tony sadly. "I am used to being misunderstood." He paused. "What did you think of Isabel?" he asked.

Guy was evidently prepared for the question. "I was pleasantly surprised with her," he admitted. "She seemed to me a very attractive girl, and I should think quite straightforward."

Again Tony nodded his head. "Yes," he said, "I think that's true. It makes me all the more sorry I can't go on helping her."

"Can't go on helping her!" repeated Guy. "What do you mean?"

"Well, she told me her history yesterday, and it's not at all the sort of thing a rising young politician ought to be mixed up with. She admitted as much herself. I am afraid the only thing to do is to get rid of her as quickly as we can."

Guy sat up indignantly. "I don't know what you

are talking about," he said, "but I am quite sure you have misunderstood her in some way or other. Anyhow what you suggest is impossible. You can't pick up people and drop them again in this thoughtless and selfish fashion. What's the girl to do? You have chosen to make yourself responsible for her, and you must arrange to send her back to her people—or something."

"Unfortunately," said Tony, "there are difficulties in the way. Her father and mother are both dead, and her nearest relations are all out of work for the moment."

"Has she any profession?" asked Guy.

Tony nodded.

"Yes, she's a queen."

There was a short silence. "A *what?*" demanded Guy.

"A queen!" repeated Tony. "It's not a profession that I altogether approve of for women, but she had been brought up to it, and——"

Guy pushed back his chair. "Look here, Tony," he exclaimed, "what on earth are you talking about?"

Tony raised his eyebrows. "Isabel," he explained patiently. "Cousin Isabel. The nice little red-haired girl you were teaching gardening to yesterday. She is the only daughter of that late lamented inebriate—Don Francisco of Livadia."

With a startled ejaculation Guy suddenly sat up straight in his chair. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but nothing intelligible seemed to suggest itself.

"Furthermore," pursued Tony tranquilly, "she

is the affianced wife of our illustrious little pal King Pedro the Fifth. That of course explains why she has run away."

By a supreme effort Guy succeeded in regaining his lost powers of conversation. His face was a beautiful study in amazement, dismay, and incredulity.

"But—but—Good Heavens!" he gasped; "This can't be true! You must be joking!"

"Joking!" repeated Tony sternly. "Of course I'm not joking. No respectable Englishman ever jokes at breakfast."

Guy threw up his hands with a gesture that was almost tragic.

"Well, if it's true," he observed, "you have just about gone and done it this time with a vengeance." He got up from his seat, took a couple of agitated paces towards the window, and then came back to the table where the future member for Balham North was still placidly munching his toast. "Good Lord, Tony!" he exclaimed; "don't you understand what a serious matter this is?"

"Of course I do," said Tony. "You don't suppose I would talk about it at breakfast otherwise."

"It's more than serious," continued Guy in a strained voice. "It's—it's the most unholy mess that even you have ever mixed yourself up in. If this girl is really who you say she is, we shall have the whole diplomatic service tumbling over themselves to find her." He paused. "For goodness' sake tell me the whole story at once; there may possibly be some way out of it after all."

"I don't think there is," said Tony contentedly. "Of course I could desert Isabel, but as you have just pointed out to me, that would be very brutal and dishonourable. Anyhow, if you will take a pew and try and look a little less like Sarah Bernhardt, I'll tell you exactly how things stand. Then you can judge for yourself."

Guy resumed his seat, and after pausing to light himself a third cigarette, Tony began to repeat Isabel's romantic history, more or less as she had described it to him at Cookham on the previous day. There was a leisurely style about his method that must have been somewhat provoking to Guy, whose anxiety to hear the whole truth seemed to be of a painful intensity. Tony, however, proceeded in his own unhurried fashion, and by a masterly exhibition of self-control Guy refrained from any comment or interruption until the entire story was told.

Then he sat back in his chair with the stony expression of one who has learnt the worst.

Tony looked at him sympathetically. "One can't very well get out of it, can one, Guy?" he observed. "Of course I might give Isabel a week's notice, but after the bitter and scornful way you spoke to me just now about my selfishness I should hardly like to do that. Besides, as a moral man I strongly disapprove of Pedro's intentions. I think nobody should be allowed to marry who has not led a perfectly pure life."

"Oh, shut up," said Guy; "shut up and let me think." He buried his forehead in his hands for a

moment or two, and then looked up again with such a harassed appearance that Tony felt quite sorry for him. "It's—it's worse than I thought," he added despairingly. "What on earth do you imagine is going to be the end of it?"

"I haven't the remotest notion," admitted Tony cheerfully. "The only thing I have quite made up my mind about is that Isabel shan't be forced into marrying Pedro."

"I agree with you there," said Guy with sudden warmth. "It's an infamous proposal. I can't see what's at the bottom of it either unless there is still a party in Livadia who believe in her father's claim. I thought they were pretty well extinct." He paused for a moment, his brow puckered in deep and anxious reflection. "Anyhow," he added, "you have put yourself into a frightfully delicate position. Da Freitas will move heaven and earth to find the girl, and you can be quite sure he will get any possible assistance he asks for from our people."

"I don't believe he'll ask for any," said Tony. "I've got a notion that they want to keep this marriage business as quiet as possible. Why should they have tried to rush it so, otherwise? If that's right they will probably be only too anxious to keep the police out of it, especially since they have seen Isabel with me."

"But do you think her uncle recognized you?"

"Can't say," replied Tony tranquilly. "He only saw me for a second in the hall of the Club, and he was so agitated then that even a beautiful face like

mine might have escaped him. Still I should think they were bound to get on our track sooner or later. That's the worst of a carelessly built place like London. One always runs into the people one doesn't want to meet."

"There are those other men too," said Guy, who was evidently pondering each point in the problem—"the men who are following her about. What do you make of them?"

"I shall have to make an example of them," said Tony firmly. "I really can't have dirty foreigners hanging about outside my house. It's so bad for one's reputation."

"Oh, do be serious for a moment," pleaded Guy almost angrily. "We are *in* this business now, and——"

"*We!*" echoed Tony with pleasure. "My dear Guy! Do you really mean that you're going to lend us your powerful aid?"

"Of course I am," said Guy impatiently. "I think you were very foolish to mix yourself up in the affair at all, but since you have chosen to do it, you don't suppose that I shall desert you. If ever you wanted assistance I should say you did now."

Tony leaned across, and taking his cousin's hand, shook it warmly over the breakfast table.

"Dear old Guy," he observed. "I always thought that under a rather forbidding exterior you concealed the heart of a true sportsman."

"Nonsense," returned Guy. "I am your secretary, and it's my business to look after you when

you make an idiot of yourself." He paused. "Besides," he added, "there is the girl to be considered."

Tony nodded. "Yes," he said, "we must consider Isabel. By the way I have never thanked you for being so nice to her yesterday. She told me that you were perfectly charming."

For a second time Guy's face assumed a faint tinge of colour.

"One couldn't help feeling sorry for the child when one spoke to her," he said stiffly. "It appears to be no fault of her own that she has been put in this impossible position." He hesitated for a moment. "I hope to goodness, Tony," he added, "that you—you——"

Tony laughed softly. "It's quite all right," he said. "Don't be alarmed, Guy. My feelings towards Isabel are as innocent as the dawn." He glanced at the slim gold watch that he wore on his wrist, and then in a leisurely fashion got up from his chair. "I hate to break up this charming breakfast party," he said, "but I must be off. I am going to look up Isabel on my way to Aunt Fanny's. I want to see how many intruding strangers Bugg has murdered in the night."

Guy also rose to his feet.

"I say, Tony," he said. "Let us understand each other quite clearly. However you choose to look at it, this is an uncommonly serious business—and there are some very ugly possibilities in it. We can't afford to treat it as a joke—not if you really want to keep Isabel out of these people's hands."

Tony nodded his head. "I know that, Guy," he said. "I can't help my incurable light-heartedness, but I can assure you that Cousin Henry himself couldn't be more deadly serious about it than I am. I promise you faithfully I won't play the fool."

"Right you are," said Guy. "In that case you can count on me to the utmost."

It was about a quarter of an hour later when Tony pulled up the big Peugeot outside Mrs. Spalding's, and climbing down from his seat pushed open the gate. As he did so the door of the house was opened in turn by Bugg, who presented a singularly spruce and animated appearance. His hair had evidently been brushed and brilliantined with extreme care, and he was wearing a tight-fitting black and white check suit that reminded one of a carefully made draught-board.

"Good-morning, Bugg," said Tony, as he came up the steps. "You look very beautiful."

Bugg saluted with a slightly embarrassed smile.

"I brought along me Sunday togs, Sir Ant'ny; seein' as 'ow I was to be livin' in the 'ouse with two ladies."

"Quite right, Bugg," said Tony approvingly. "It's just that thoughtfulness in small matters that makes the true artist in life." He paused to pull off his driving gloves. "Is there any news?" he asked.

Bugg cast a quick warning glance over his shoulder into the house.

"'Ere's the young laidy, sir," he replied in a hoarse whisper. "See yer ahtside after."

He moved away as Isabel came lightly down the stairs, and advanced along the passage to meet them.

She greeted Tony with just the faintest touch of shyness, and then led the way into the small sitting-room on the right.

Here she held out her hand to him, and bowing over it with extreme gravity, Tony kissed the pink tip of one of her fingers.

"I trust your Majesty slept well?" he observed.

She pulled away her hand. "Oh, please don't tease me," she said. "You can't imagine how funny I feel about it all." She paused. "If we hadn't met Uncle Philip yesterday, I believe I should have begun to think the whole thing was a dream."

"Perhaps it is," said Tony. "Personally I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I woke up and found Spalding standing by my bed with a cup of tea."

"It doesn't matter really anyway," said Isabel, "because we are all dreaming the same thing, aren't we? You and I and Bugg, and—and your cousin Mr. Guy."

"Guy certainly is," answered Tony. "You have made a positively devastating conquest of poor Guy. How on earth did you manage to do it?"

Isabel opened her amber eyes. "I don't know," she said innocently. "He was very nice and kind. I only talked to him and smiled at him."

"Ah, that accounts for it," said Tony solemnly. He put his hat down and seated himself on the sofa. "You really ought to be more careful," he added. "It isn't fair to go about bewitching respectable

secretaries. You never know what they may turn into."

"Have you told him?" asked Isabel.

"Everything," said Tony. "He is yearning to plunge into the fray and re-seat you on the throne of Livadia. I left him practising sword exercises in the hall."

Isabel laughed, and opening the bag that was lying on the table beside her took out a little silver cigarette case, which she offered to Tony.

"Do have one," she said. "I bought it yesterday afternoon out of the money you gave me. It was very extravagant, but I love shopping. You see I have not been allowed to do any in London."

Tony, who never smoked anything but Virginian tobacco, helped himself bravely to a gold tipped product of the Turkish Empire, and lit it with apparent zest.

"All the truest pleasure in life comes from doing things one hasn't been allowed to do," he observed. "To enjoy anything properly one ought to go in for a long course of self-denial first."

"I—I suppose you're right," said Isabel doubtfully, "but it's rather difficult, isn't it?"

"I should think it was," said Tony. "I have never tried it myself." He felt in his pocket for a moment, and then pulled out a cheque book, which bore the stamped address of the same Hampstead bank at which he kept his own account.

"This is yours, Isabel," he said handing it across to her. "I have paid the money I got for the brooch

into your account, so you can go on shopping as long and fiercely as you like. Do you know how to draw a cheque?"

Isabel nodded. "Oh, yes," she said. "You just fill it in and write your name at the bottom, and then they give you the money. It's quite easy, isn't it."

"Quite," said Tony. "All real miracles are."

Isabel slipped away the cheque book into her bag. Then she looked at Tony with that half childish and wholly delightful smile of hers.

"Now I am rich," she said. "I can begin entertaining." She hesitated. "Should I be doing anything very dreadful—I—I mean from the English point of view—if I asked you to come and have dinner with me somewhere to-night?"

"Of course you wouldn't," said Tony firmly. "A queen has an absolutely free hand about things like that. It's what is called the Royal Prerogative. There is a well established precedent in the case of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester."

"That's all right then," said Isabel in a relieved voice. "What time will you come?"

"Quite early," said Tony. "In fact I think I will come to tea if I may. I am lunching with Cousin Henry and his wife and that always makes me thirsty." He glanced at his watch, and then got up from the sofa. "I mustn't stop any longer now," he added. "I have several things to do before I get to Chester Square, and it's so rude to keep people waiting for lunch. Besides it spoils the lunch."

Isabel laughed happily, and rising to her feet gave him her hand again—this time with little or no trace of her former shyness. Indeed it was difficult to be shy with Tony for any very extended period.

"I will see that you have some nice tea anyway," she said. "I will make it for you myself."

Tony paused for a moment on the threshold of the house to exchange his Turkish cigarette for a Virginian, and then strolled off down the garden towards the gate. As he approached the latter it was opened for him by "Tiger" Bugg, who had apparently been waiting patiently beside the car.

"Don't look hup, sir," observed that distinguished welter-weight in a low earnest voice. "Jest carry on saime as if we was talkin' abaht nothin' partic'lar."

With an air of complete indifference Tony strolled across the pavement to the front of the car and lifted up the bonnet. Bugg followed, and bent over the exposed engine beside him, as though pointing out some minor deficiency.

"There's one of them blokes watchin' of us," continued "Tiger" in the same confidential tone. "'E's be'ind the fence opposite. Bin 'anging arahnd 'ere all the blinkin' morning."

"Really!" said Tony gently. "Which of them is it?"

"It's the shorter one, sir. The one I give that flip in the jaw to. I seen 'im w'en I come aht o' the front door this mornin'. 'E was doin' a sorter boy scout stunt be'ind the bushes, and I 'ad 'alf a mind to land 'im with one o' them loose bricks. Then I

remembers wot you'd said yesterday—abaht lyin' low like—so I jest 'ums a toon and pretends I 'adn't spotted 'im."

"You have the true instincts of a sleuth, Bugg," observed Tony approvingly.

"I shouldn't be 'alf surprised if they was both abaht somewhere," went on the gratified "Tiger" in a hoarse whisper. "It's my belief, sir, that they mean to 'ang arahnd until they sees a chance of gettin' at the young laidy without no interruptions from us. I'd bet a dollar that if I was to clear off the plaice for 'arf an hour, they'd be shovin' their dirty selves into the 'ouse all right—some'ow or other."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tony softly. "You have given me an idea, Bugg—a brilliant idea."

He continued to reflect in silence for a moment or two, and then at last he shut down the bonnet with that particularly pleasant smile of his which Guy always declared to be the sure harbinger of approaching trouble.

"I shall return about four o'clock, Bugg," he said. "I think we may have an interesting and instructive afternoon ahead of us—thanks to you."

Bugg sighed happily. "I'll be 'ere, sir," he observed. "I'd like to see that there tall bloke again. I 'ate leavin' a job 'alf finished."

"And meanwhile," said Tony, "take particular care of Miss Francis. "It's quite possible there may be somebody else wanting to speak to her privately besides our pals opposite."

Bugg's eyes gleamed. "It don't make no differ-

ence to me, sir, 'ow many of 'em there is. Nothin' doin'. That's my motter as far as visitors goes."

Tony nodded approvingly, and entering the car started off down the hill, leaving Bugg standing grimly at the gate, in an attitude that must have been deeply discouraging to any concealed gentleman who might be hoping for an early entrance.

After visiting his tailor in Sackville Street, and discharging one or two other less momentous duties, Tony made his way to Chester Square, where he pulled up outside Lady Jocelyn's house, exactly as the clock of St. Peter's was striking one-thirty.

Punctual as he was Laura and Henry had arrived before him. He heard the former's rich contralto voice in full swing as the maid preceded him up the staircase, and it was with that vague feeling of depression the sound invariably inspired in him that he entered the charmingly furnished little drawing-room.

Lady Jocelyn, who looked rather like an old ivory miniature, was sitting on the sofa, and going up to her Tony bent over and kissed her affectionately. Then he shook hands with both his cousins.

"I have been hearing the most wonderful things about you, Tony," said Lady Jocelyn. "If I didn't dislike veal so much I should certainly have killed the fatted calf for lunch. Is it really true that you are going to become the member for—for—where is it, Laura?"

"Balham North," remarked Laura firmly.

She was a tall fair-haired lady, with thin lips, a

masterful nose, and a pair of relentless blue eyes.

"I believe it's quite true, Aunt Fanny," returned Tony. "In fact I understand it has all been arranged except for the formality of consulting the natives."

"How splendid," said Lady Jocelyn. "And who are the natives? I always thought Balham was still unexplored."

Tony shook his head. "Oh, no," he said. "Henry has been right into the interior. He can even speak the language—can't you, Henry?"

"There is nothing to laugh at about Balham," said Henry a little stiffly. "It is one of the best residential suburbs in London."

"And extremely well educated politically," put in Laura in her clear incisive voice. "I have been looking into the matter, and I find that our various temperance and purity leagues have no less than seven branches there, and that the reports from all of them are distinctly encouraging. On the whole I regard it as one of the most hopeful constituencies in London."

Lady Jocelyn looked a little puzzled. "What do they hope for?" she inquired.

"Lunch m'lady," remarked the parlour-maid, opening the door.

"In that case," said Tony gravely, "they couldn't have chosen a more efficient representative."

Like the wise woman she was, Lady Jocelyn always had an excellent cook, and a single glance at the menu as they settled themselves down round the table had an inspiring effect upon the entire party. Even

Laura was not wholly exempt from its influence. Though a stern advocate of the superior food value of lentils and beans as far as the poor were concerned, she herself had a very handsome appreciation for the less scientific forms of diet. She ate with enthusiasm and staying power; after a second helping of mousse of ham and cold asparagus, she became more affable than Tony had ever seen her.

"I can hardly describe the satisfaction that Tony's decision to stand has given to Henry and me," she observed to Lady Jocelyn. "We have been trying for years to persuade him to do something worthy of his position. A life of empty pleasure is such an appallingly bad example for the poor."

"I am not quite sure that I agree with you there," said Tony. "I believe the possibility of being able to live eventually in complete idleness is one of the few real incentives to hard work. There ought to be one or two examples about, so that people can realize how pleasant that sort of life is."

"You have done your share, Tony," said Lady Jocelyn consolingly. "You will be able to go to sleep in the House of Commons with a perfectly clear conscience."

"Of course you are joking, Aunt Fanny," said Henry. "You are much too well informed to believe that sort of nonsense. I doubt if there is a more arduous profession in the world than being a member of Parliament—provided of course that a man takes his work seriously. Tony has promised us that he will do that."

"And we shall be there to keep him up to it," added Laura crisply.

Lady Jocelyn looked at Tony with some sympathy. "I only hope he won't break down," she said. "It's not everyone who can stand these severe strains."

"Oh, Tony's as sound as a bell," returned Henry a little contemptuously. "Hard work will do him all the good in the world—it's just what he wants. I have been advising him to take up some special subject and master it thoroughly before he goes into the House. It's the only way to get on quickly nowadays." He turned to Tony. "Have you thought that over at all yet? I mean do you feel a special leaning towards any particular question?"

Tony took a long drink of champagne and put down his glass.

"Yes, Henry," he said, "during the last two days I have discovered that foreign politics have a remarkable attraction for me."

"Foreign politics!" repeated Henry. "Well, they're an interesting subject, but I should have thought you would have found them a little too—too—what shall we say—too remote."

Tony shook his head. "No," he said, "I haven't found that. Of course I don't know very much about them yet, but I expect to be learning quite a lot before long."

"Well, that's the right spirit anyway," said Henry heartily. "When I get back I will instruct my secretary to send you along some White Books to study. Remember if there is anything we can do to

help you—introductions you would like or anything of that sort—don't hesitate to ask us."

"I won't," said Tony.

Harmoniously as matters had been proceeding up to this point, the remainder of the lunch party was even more of a pronounced success. It was evident that Tony's sudden and surprising absorption in world politics was highly approved of both by Henry and Laura, who seemed to regard it as a sign that he was beginning to take his Parliamentary career with becoming seriousness. If at times old Lady Jocelyn's twinkling black eyes suggested a certain amount of scepticism in the matter, she at least said nothing to disturb this pleasant impression, while Tony himself sustained his new rôle with that imperturbable ease of manner which never seemed to desert him.

It was nearly half-past three before Laura and Henry rose to go, and then they took their leave with an approving friendliness that reminded one of a tutor saying good-bye to a promising pupil.

"I will have those White Books sent round at once," said Henry, warmly shaking his cousin's hand. "There is a new one just issued dealing with the Patagonia boundary dispute. You will find it most interesting."

"It sounds ripping," said Tony.

"And you needn't worry a bit about your election," added Laura. "Henry's seat is so safe that I shall be able to give up my entire time to helping you."

"That *will* be nice, won't it, Tony?" said Lady Jocelyn innocently.

She rose to her feet with the aid of her ebony stick, and taking Henry's arm accompanied him and Laura to the head of the staircase, where she said good-bye to them both. She then came back into the room, and closing the door behind her, shook her head slowly and reprovingly at the future member for Balham North.

"I should like to know exactly what pleasant surprise you are preparing for them, Tony," she said.

Tony came up, and putting his arm round her, conducted her gently to her customary place on the sofa.

"I wonder if the Prodigal Son had a sceptical aunt?" he said sadly.

With a little chuckle Lady Jocelyn settled herself into her seat. "Probably," she replied; "and if she carved the veal I have no doubt she gave him the best helping."

Tony stood back and surveyed her affectionately. "Do you know what an Enterprise is, Aunt Fanny?" he asked. "An Enterprise with a large capital E at the beginning?"

Lady Jocelyn looked up at him with an air of mild surprise.

"I believe it is a thing that people prosecute," she replied. "Why do you ask?"

"I am engaged on one," said Tony. "I can't tell you what it is to-day, because I have got to go in three minutes, and I always stammer if I try to talk

quickly. Besides it's too interesting to hurry over."

"My dear Tony," said Lady Jocelyn; "you fill me with curiosity. If you don't come round again soon and tell me all about it I shall never forgive you."

"I shall come," said Tony. "I fancy it's going to be one of those enterprises which will absorb a good deal of advice and assistance."

"You can count on mine," said Lady Jocelyn, "even if I have to imperil my hitherto unblemished reputation in Chester Square."

Tony bent down and kissed her cheek. "Dear Aunt Fanny," he said. "I should certainly propose to you if it wasn't forbidden in the prayer-book."

Lady Jocelyn laughed and patted his hand. "I appreciate the compliment, Tony," she said, "but perhaps it's just as well as it is. I am getting old, and you would be a very bad preparation for the next world." She paused. "Remember," she added; "if you don't come back within three days and tell me all about the Enterprise I shall put the matter in the hands of the S.P.C.A."

"What's that?" inquired Tony.

"The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Aunts," said Lady Jocelyn.

A slight but natural reluctance on the part of the Peugeot to leave such a select neighbourhood, delayed Tony for several minutes outside the house. At length, however, he managed to persuade the big car to start, and just baffling a masterly attempt at

suicide by a passing terrier, he set off on his return journey to Hampstead.

He did not go direct to Mrs. Spalding's, but continued his way straight up Haverstock Hill and across the Heath to his own house. Here he got out and handed the car over to the care of Jennings, who came sauntering down from the garage in his usual sombre fashion.

"You can put her away, Jennings," he said, brushing the dust from his sleeve. "If I want anything to-night I shall take a taxi. This perpetual dashing about in high-powered cars is apt to induce arrogance."

Jennings received this statement with an unmoved expression, and leaving him to carry out his instructions, Tony entered the hall. He walked across to the stick rack in the corner, where he proceeded to select a large and particularly heavy Irish blackthorn from the numerous specimens that it contained. He weighed this thoughtfully in his hand, and then, apparently satisfied with its possibilities, he lighted himself a cigar and strolled off down the drive and out across the Heath in the direction of Mrs. Spalding's house.

CHAPTER XI

THE BAITED TRAP

LATIMER LANE, which was the name of the secluded little road in which the Spaldings' house was situated, presented a most restful appearance as Tony entered it from the upper end. Except for a solitary cat sunning herself in the gutter, there was no sign of life throughout its entire length. If any sinister-looking gentlemen were really lurking in the neighbourhood, they had at least succeeded in concealing themselves with the most praiseworthy skill.

With his blackthorn in his hand Tony sauntered peacefully along the pavement. There was nothing about his appearance to suggest that he was taking any unusual interest in his surroundings. His whole demeanour was as free from suspicion as that of the cat herself, who merely opened one sleepy eye at his approach, and then closed it again with an air of sun-warmed indifference.

He turned in at the gate of Mrs. Spalding's house without so much as a backward glance, and strolling up the garden path, knocked lightly at the door. It was opened almost immediately by Bugg, whose

face lit up with that same sort of simple-hearted smile that Ney used to assume at the appearance of Napoleon.

"It's all right, sir," he whispered exultingly, as soon as the door was closed again. "'E's still there, an' 'tother bloke too!"

Tony hung up his hat, and with tender care deposited his blackthorn on the hall table.

"That's splendid, Bugg," he said. "Where is Miss Francis?"

With a jerk of his thumb, Bugg indicated the basement.

"She's dahn there along o' Mrs. Spalding, sir."

The words had hardly left his lips, when Isabel, slightly flushed and looking prettier than ever, emerged from the head of the kitchen stairs.

"Oh," she said, "you have just come at the right time. Mrs. Spalding and I have been making some scones for tea."

Tony looked at her in admiration. "What wild and unexpected talents you have, Isabel," he remarked.

She laughed happily. "I can make very good scones," she said. "That was one of the extra and private accomplishments that Miss Watson taught me." She paused. "How soon would you like to have tea?"

"Do you mind putting it off for a little bit?" said Tony. "I have got something I want to speak to you about first." He turned to Bugg. "Go out

into the yard behind, Bugg," he said, "and have a nice careful look at the back wall. I want to know if it's fairly easy to climb and what there is the other side of it."

With that invaluable swiftness of action that distinguishes a successful welter-weight, Bugg wheeled round and shot off on his errand. Isabel gazed after him for a moment in surprise, and then turned back to Tony with a slightly bewildered expression.

"Is there anything the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing the least serious," said Tony reassuringly. "I am thinking of entertaining a couple of old friends of ours who are too shy to call in the usual way."

A sudden look of understanding flashed into Isabel's face, and taking a quick step forward she laid her hand lightly on Tony's arm.

"You mean those men—those two men?" she whispered. "Why—are they outside? Have they found out where I am?"

Tony patted her hand. "There's nothing to be frightened about, Isabel," he said. "At least not for us."

She drew herself up proudly. "I'm not frightened," she said, "not a bit. I told you I should never be frightened again as long as I had you to help me." She took a long breath. "What are you going to do?" she asked. "Kill them?"

Tony laughed. "I think we ought to find out first what they want," he said. "There's a sort of

prejudice in this country against massacring people at sight."

"I—I forgot we were in England," said Isabel apologetically. "I have heard father and the others talk so much about killing people, it doesn't seem nearly as serious to me as it ought to."

"Never mind," said Tony consolingly. "We all have our weak points." He leaned over and tipped off the ash of his cigar into the umbrella stand. "According to Bugg," he added, "our two friends have been hanging about outside the house ever since Tuesday."

Isabel opened her eyes. "Since Tuesday!" she repeated. "But why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to worry you. I knew you would be quite safe with Bugg here, so I thought it was better to wait until I had made up my mind what to do." He paused. "Whoever these two beauties are it's quite evident that what they're really yearning for is another little private chat with you. At least it's difficult to see what else they can be after unless they are going in for a fresh air cure."

Isabel nodded her head. "It's me all right," she observed with some conviction.

"Well, under the circumstances," pursued Tony tranquilly, "I propose to give them the chance of gratifying their ambition. I always like to help people gratify their ambition, even if it involves a little personal trouble and exertion."

Isabel's amber eyes lit up with an expectant and

rather unkind pleasure. "What are you going to do?" she asked again.

"It depends to a certain extent on Bugg's report," replied Tony. "The idea is that he and I should go out by the front gate, work our way round to the back, and make a quiet and unobtrusive re-entrance over the garden wall. We should then be on the premises in case any one took it into their heads to call during our absence."

Isabel laughed joyously. "That's a lovely idea," she exclaimed. "I do hope——"

She was interrupted by the sudden reappearance of Bugg, who came rapidly up the staircase in the same noiseless and unexpected fashion that he had departed in.

"Well?" said Tony, throwing away the stump of his cigar.

"There ain't nothin' wrong abaht the wall, sir," replied Bugg cheerfully. "One can 'op over that as easy as sneezin'."

"What is there the other side of it?" asked Tony.

"It gives on to the back garden of the 'Ollies—that big empty 'ouse in 'Eath Street."

"How very obliging of it," said Tony contentedly. He turned to Isabel. "It's no good wasting time, is it?" he added. "I think I had better go straight down and tell Mrs. Spalding what we propose to do. She ought to know something about it, just in case we have to slaughter any one on her best carpet."

Isabel looked a little doubtful. "I hope she won't mind," she said.

"I don't think she will," replied Tony. "I have always found her most reasonable about trifles." He turned back to Bugg. "Better find a bag or something to take with you when you go out," he added. "I want you to look as if you were on your way back to Goodman's Rest."

Bugg saluted, and making his way downstairs, Tony tapped gently at what appeared to be the kitchen door. It was opened by Mrs. Spalding who at the sight of her visitor showed distinct traces of surprise and concern.

"Why ever didn't you ring, Sir Antony?" she inquired almost reproachfully.

"It's all right, Mrs. Spalding," he replied in his cheerful fashion. "I came down purposely because I want to have a little private talk with you." He moved aside a plate, and before she could protest seated himself on the corner of the table. "You remember what I told you a couple of days ago about the house being watched?"

"Indeed yes, sir," said Mrs. Spalding. "They are still hanging about the place according to what Bugg says. I am sure I don't know what the police can be up to allowing a thing like that to go on in a respectable neighbourhood."

"It's scandalous," agreed Tony warmly. "As far as I can see the only thing to do is to take the matter into our hands. The men are probably a couple of ruffians employed to watch the place by Miss Francis' guardian."

Mrs. Spalding nodded her head. "I shouldn't be a

bit surprised, sir. Them foreigners are up to anything."

"It must be put a stop to," said Tony firmly. "Of course I could insist upon the police taking it up, but I think on the whole it would be better if we tackled the matter ourselves. One doesn't want the half-penny papers to get hold of it, or anything of that sort."

"Certainly not, sir," said Mrs. Spalding in a shocked voice. "It would never do for a gentleman in your position."

"Well, I have thought of a plan," began Tony, "but the fact is—" he paused artistically—"well, the fact is, Mrs. Spalding, I should hardly like to trouble you any further after the extremely kind way in which you have already helped us."

The good woman was visibly affected. "You mustn't think of that, Sir Antony," she protested. "I am sure it's a real pleasure to do anything I can for you and the young lady—such a nice sweet-spoken young lady she is too."

"Well, of course, if you really feel like that about it," observed Tony; and without wasting efforts on any further diplomacy, he proceeded to sketch out the plan of campaign that he had already described to Isabel.

"It's quite simple, you see," he finished. "We pop back over the garden wall and through the kitchen window, and there we are. Then if these scoundrels do turn up and ask for Miss Francis, you have only got to let them in and

leave the rest to us. I don't think they will bother us much more—not after I've finished with them."

For a respectable woman, who had hitherto led a peaceful and law-abiding life, Mrs. Spalding received the scheme with surprising calmness.

"You will be careful about the climbing the wall, won't you, sir?" she observed. "It's that old, there's no knowing whether it will bear a gentleman of your weight."

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Spalding," said Tony reassuringly. "I shall allow Bugg to go first."

He got down off the table, and after once more expressing his thanks, made his way upstairs again into the hall.

He found Isabel standing at the door of the sitting-room just as he had left her.

"Well?" she asked eagerly.

"There are no difficulties," said Tony. "Mrs. Spalding is all for a forward policy."

As he spoke there was a sound of footsteps above them, and Bugg descended the staircase carrying a small bag in one hand and his cap in the other.

"I think we may as well make a start," continued Tony. "Don't hurry yourself, 'Tiger.' Just paddle along comfortably, and whatever you do keep your eyes off the opposite side of the road. You can either take the bag back to Goodman's Rest, or else leave it in the bar at the Castle. Anyhow meet me in a quarter of an hour's time in the back garden of the Hollies."

Bugg nodded his head. "I'll be there, Sir Ant'ny," he replied grimly.

Tony pushed open the door of the sitting-room. "We had better wait in here, Isabel," he said. "We mustn't be seen conspiring together in the hall when Bugg goes out, or it might put the enemy on his guard."

A few seconds later the peace of Latimer Lane was suddenly disturbed by the banging of Mrs. Spalding's front door. Whistling a bright little music hall ditty to himself, Bugg came marching down the garden path and passed out through the gate into the roadway. He paused for a moment to extract and light himself a Woodbine cigarette, and then, without looking back at the house, set off at a leisurely pace in the direction of the Heath.

For ten minutes a deep unbroken hush brooded over the neighbourhood. If there were any human beings about they still remained silent and invisible, while the solitary cat, who had glanced up resentfully as Bugg passed, gradually resumed her former attitude of somnolent repose.

Then once more the door of number sixteen opened, and Tony and Isabel made their appearance. The latter was wearing no hat, and her red-gold hair gleamed in the sunshine, like copper in the firelight. They strolled down together as far as the gate, where they remained for a few moments laughing and chatting. Then, with a final and fairly audible observation to the effect that he would be back about six, Tony took his departure. He went off to the

left, in the opposite direction from that patronized by Bugg.

Turning lightly round Isabel sauntered back up the garden. The front door closed behind her, and once again peace—the well ordered peace of a superior London suburb, descended upon Latimer Lane.

At the back of the house Mrs. Spalding was standing at the kitchen window, which she had pushed up to its fullest extent. Her eyes were fixed anxiously upon the summit of the wall which divided her miniature back yard from the adjoining property. It was a venerable wall, of early Victorian origin, about twelve feet in height, and thickly covered with a mat of ivy.

At last, from the other side came a faint rustle, followed almost immediately by the unmistakable scrape and scuffle of somebody attempting an ascent. Then a hand and arm appeared over the top, and a moment later Bugg had hoisted himself into view, and was sitting astride the parapet. He paused for an instant to whisper back some hoarse but inaudible remark, and then catching hold of the ivy swung himself neatly and rapidly to the ground.

There was another and rather louder scuffle, and Tony followed suit. He came down into the yard even quicker than Bugg—his descent being somewhat accelerated by the behaviour of a branch of ivy, which detached itself from the wall, just as he had got his full weight on it.

"Yer ain't 'urt yerself, 'ave ye, sir?" inquired the faithful "Tiger" with some anxiety.

Tony shook his head, and discarded the handful of foliage that he was still clutching.

"One should never trust entirely to Nature, Bugg," he observed. "She invariably lets one down."

He stopped to flick off the dust and cobwebs from the knees of his trousers, and then leading the way across the yard to the kitchen window, he scrambled in over the sill.

"I am afraid I have thinned out your ivy a bit, Mrs. Spalding," he remarked regretfully.

"It doesn't matter the least about that, sir," replied Mrs. Spalding, "so long as you haven't gone and shook yourself up."

"I don't think I have," said Tony. "I feel extraordinarily well except for a slight craving for tea." He paused. "No sign of the enemy yet, I suppose?"

Mrs. Spalding shook her head. "It's all been quite quiet so far, Sir Antony."

"Well, I think we had better go upstairs and arrange our plans," he observed. "We *may* have plenty of time, but it's just as well to be on the safe side. There's a strain of impetuosity in the foreign blood that one has to look out for."

He moved towards the door; and followed by Mrs. Spalding and Bugg—the latter of whom had climbed in through the window after him—he mounted the flight of stone stairs that led up into the hall.

"I suppose Miss Francis is in her bedroom?" he said turning to Mrs. Spalding.

She nodded her head. "Yes, Sir Antony. She went up directly she came back into the house."

He took a step forward and stood for a moment contemplating the scene with the thoughtful air of a general surveying the site of a future battle.

"I think your place, Bugg," he said, "will be half-way up the staircase, just out of sight of the front door. I shall wait in the sitting-room, and Mrs. Spalding will be downstairs in the kitchen." He paused. "What will happen is this. When the bell rings Mrs. Spalding will come up and open the door. Directly she does, our friends will probably force their way into the hall and ask to see Miss Francis. They will know she is upstairs, because as a matter of fact she is sitting in the window reading a book."

"Am I to let them through, sir?" inquired Mrs. Spalding.

"Not without a protest," said Tony; "but I expect as a matter of fact they will simply push past you. People like that have very bad manners, especially when they are pressed for time. In that case all you have got to do will be to fall back to the kitchen stairs and leave the rest to us."

Bugg sighed happily. "An' then I s'pose I comes dahn and we shoves it across 'em, sir?" he inquired.

"That's the idea," said Tony, "but there's no need to be rough or unkind about it. All I want to do is to get them into the sitting-room in a sufficiently chastened frame of mind to answer a few civil ques-

tions. It oughtn't to be difficult unless they have got revolvers."

"Revolvers!" repeated Mrs. Spalding in some distress. "Oh, dear, dear! You will be careful, won't you, Sir Antony?"

"I shall," said Tony: "extremely careful."

He walked to the hall table and picked up the blackthorn that he had left lying there. "I don't think I shall want this," he remarked, "but perhaps——"

He broke off abruptly, as a faint sound from outside suddenly reached his ear.

"Listen!" he said softly. "What's that?"

There was a moment's pause, and then quite clearly came the unmistakable click of the front gate.

Swiftly and quietly Tony stepped back to the sitting-room door.

"Here they are!" he announced with a cheerful smile. "Take it coolly: there's heaps of time."

Considering the abrupt nature of the crisis, it must be admitted that both Mrs. Spalding and Bugg rose to the occasion in the most creditable fashion. In three strides the latter had disappeared up the staircase, while if Mrs. Spalding was a shade less precipitous, it was only because she was not so well fitted by nature for sudden and violent transitions.

Tony waited until they were both out of sight, and then with a final glance round the hall he stepped back into the sitting-room. He closed the door after him until only the faintest crack was visible from outside, and having placed his blackthorn

carefully in the corner, he stood there in easy readiness, his hand resting lightly on the door knob.

For perhaps thirty seconds the steady ticking of the hall clock alone broke the silence. Then the sound of a slight movement became suddenly audible outside the house, and a moment later the sharp *tang, tang* of a bell went jangling through the basement. With a contented smile Tony began to button up his coat.

He heard Mrs. Spalding mount the stairs and pass along the hall passage outside. There was the sharp snap of a bolt being pushed back, and then almost simultaneously came a sudden scuffle of footsteps, and the loud bang of an abruptly closed door.

"Pardon, Madame," said a voice. "We do not wish to alarm you, but it is necessary that we speak with the young lady upstairs."

For a complete amateur in private theatricals, Mrs. Spalding played her part admirably.

"You will do nothing of the kind," she replied with every symptom of surprised indignation. "Who are you? How dare you force your way into a private house like this?"

"You will pardon us, Madame," repeated the voice, "but I fear we must insist. We mean no harm to the young lady: on the contrary we are her best—her truest friends."

Mrs. Spalding sniffed audibly. "That's as it may be," she retorted. "Anyhow, you don't set a foot on my staircase; and what's more, if you don't leave the house immediately I shall send for the police."

There was a brief whispered consultation in what sounded like a foreign language, and then the same voice spoke again.

"We dislike to use force, Madame; but since you leave us no choice——"

Once more came the quick shuffle of steps, followed in this case by the crash of an overturning chair, and then with a swift jerk Tony flung open the door, and strode blithely out into the hall. He took in the situation at a glance. True to her instructions Mrs. Spalding had retreated to the head of the kitchen banisters, where one of the intruders had followed as though to cut her off from further interference. The other was bounding gaily up the staircase, apparently under the happy impression that the road was now clear before him.

Tony just had time to see that the man in the hall was the shorter of the two, when with an exclamation of anger and alarm that gentleman spun round to meet him. As he turned his right hand travelled swiftly back towards his hip pocket, but the action though well intended was too late to be effective. With one tiger-like spring Tony had crossed the intervening distance, and clutching him affectionately round the waist, had pinned his arms to his sides.

"No shooting, Harold," he said. "You might break the pictures."

As he spoke the whole staircase was suddenly shaken by a crash upstairs, followed by the heavy thud of a falling body. Then, almost simultaneously,

the head of "Tiger" Bugg protruded itself over the banisters.

"All right below, sir?" it inquired with some anxiety.

Tony looked up. "If you have quite finished, you might come down and take away this revolver," he replied tranquilly.

That Bugg *had* finished was evident from the immediate nature of his response. He leaped down the stairs with the activity of a chamois, and darting in behind Tony's struggling captive, fished out a wicked looking Mauser pistol from that gentleman's hip pocket.

"'Ere we are, sir," he announced cheerfully. "Loaded up proper too from the look of it."

Tony released his grip, and the owner of the weapon staggered back against the wall gasping like a newly landed fish.

"Give it to me," said Tony holding out his hand, and as Bugg complied, he added in that pleasantly lazy way of his: "If you haven't corpsed the gentleman upstairs, go and bring him down into the sitting-room." Then, turning to his own late adversary, he observed hospitably: "Perhaps you wouldn't mind joining us, sir. I am sure we shall all enjoy a little chat."

The stranger, who was gradually beginning to recover from Tony's bear-like hug, scowled horribly. He was not a prepossessing looking person, for in addition to a cast in his left eye, his swarthy and truculent face was further disfigured by the scar of an

old sword cut, which seemed to have just failed in a laudable effort to slice off the greater part of his jaw. All the same there was a certain air of force and authority about him, which redeemed him from absolute ruffianism.

Beyond the scowl, however, he made no further protest, but followed by Tony and the Mauser, marched along into the sitting-room, where he folded his arms and took up a defiant posture on the hearth-rug.

There was a sound of banging and bumping from the staircase, and a moment later Bugg entered through the doorway, half carrying and half pushing the semi-conscious figure of the other invader.

"I 'it 'im a bit 'arder than I meant to, sir," he explained apologetically to Tony; "but 'e's comin' rahnd now nice an' pretty."

He deposited the convalescent carefully in the easy-chair, and then stepped back as though waiting further instructions.

It was the cross-eyed gentleman, however, who broke the silence.

"In my country," he observed thickly, "you would die for this—both of you."

Tony smiled at him indulgently. "I am sure we should," he said; "but that's the best of Hampstead; it's so devilish healthy." He paused. "Won't you sit down and make yourself comfortable?" he added.

There was something so unexpected either about the request or else the manner of it, that for a moment

the visitor seemed at a loss what to do. At length, however, he seated himself on the edge of the sofa, still glowering savagely at Tony with his working eye.

It was at this point that his friend in the chair began to emerge into something like intelligent interest in the proceedings. After blinking vaguely and shaking his head once or twice, he suddenly raised himself in his seat, and looked round him with a slightly bewildered air. His gaze finally came to rest on the barrel of the Mauser pistol which happened at the moment to be pointing in his direction.

"Feeling better?" inquired Tony kindly.

An obvious train of recollection flashed across the stranger's face, and with an instinctive movement he raised his hand to his jaw.

"I remember now," he muttered. "Something struck me. Something on the stairs."

"That's right," said Tony encouragingly. "It was Bugg's fist. Very few people can take a punch in the jaw from Bugg and remember the exact details."

The stranger looked at Tony with some curiosity. He had a more refined and intelligent face than his companion, while from the few words he had spoken his foreign accent appeared to be less pronounced.

"I presume," he said, "that I am addressing Sir Antony Conway?"

Tony nodded. "You at least have the advantage of knowing whom you're talking to."

There was a moment's pause, and then the man on the sofa laughed aggressively.

"It is an advantage that you possibly share with us," he growled.

Tony turned on him. "Except for the fact that you appear to belong to the criminal classes," he said, "I haven't the foggiest notion who either of you are."

With what sounded distressingly like an oath the cross-eyed gentleman scrambled to his feet, but a slight change in the direction of the Mauser pulled him up abruptly.

It was his friend who relieved the somewhat strained situation.

"You forget, Colonel," he said suavely. "If Sir Antony Conway is not aware who we are, our conduct must certainly appear to be a trifle peculiar." He turned back to Tony. "If you would grant us the privilege of a few moments' private conversation I fancy we might come to a better understanding. It is possible that we are rather—how do you say—at cross purposes."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Tony cheerfully. "Do you mind going out into the hall for a minute, Bugg? I am sorry to leave you out of it, but one must respect the wishes of one's guests."

It was the first occasion on which Bugg had ever received an order from Tony that he had hesitated over the immediate fulfilment.

"It ain't as I want to 'ear wot they says, sir," he explained apologetically. "It's leavin' you alone with the blighters I don't like."

"I shan't be alone, 'Tiger,'" said Tony. "I shall have this excellent little Mauser pistol to keep me company."

Bugg walked reluctantly to the door. "I'll only be just in the 'all if you want me," he observed. "You'll watch aht for any dirty work, won't ye, sir?"

"I shall," said Tony: "most intently."

He waited until the door had closed, and then seated himself on the corner of the table, with the Mauser dangling between his knees.

"Well, gentlemen?" he observed encouragingly.

"Sir Antony Conway," said the taller of the two. "Will you permit me to ask you a perfectly frank question? Are you aware of the identity of this young lady, in whose behalf you seem to have interested yourself?"

"Of course I am," said Tony.

"And may we take it that in coming as you thought to her assistance you acted from—" he paused—"from entirely private motives?" He waited for the answer with an eagerness that was plainly visible.

Tony nodded. "I never act from anything else," he remarked.

The tall man turned to his companion. "It is as I suggested, Colonel," he observed, with an air of quiet triumph.

The other still glared suspiciously at Tony. "Have a care," he muttered. "Who knows that he is speaking the truth."

The tall man made a gesture of impatience. "You

do not understand the English nobility, Colonel." He turned back to Tony. "Permit us to introduce ourselves. This is Colonel Saltero of the Livadian army. My name is Congosta—Señor Eduardo Congosta. It is a name not unknown among Livadian Loyalists."

Tony bowed bravely to the pair of them. "I am delighted to meet you both," he said. "I can't profess any great admiration for your distinguished monarch, but perhaps I don't know his finer qualities."

"Our distinguished monarch," repeated the Colonel darkly. "Of whom do you speak, Sir Antony?"

Tony raised his eyebrows. "Why—Peter of course," he said. "Pedro, I should say. Have you more than one of them?"

Colonel Saltero, who was still upon his feet, scowled more savagely than ever. "That miserable impostor," he exclaimed. "I——"

"You misunderstand us, sir," put in the smoother voice of Señor Congosta. "The person you refer to has no legitimate claim to the throne of Livadia. Like all true Loyalists we are followers of his late Majesty King Francisco the First."

It was a startling announcement, but Tony's natural composure stood him in good stead.

"Really!" he said slowly. "How extremely interesting! I thought you had all been exterminated."

Señor Congosta smiled. "You will pardon my saying so, Sir Antony, but an accurate knowledge of

Continental affairs is not one of your great nation's strong points." He paused. "Our party is more powerful now than at any time during the last fifteen years."

"But how about the government?" said Tony. "Surely they don't look on you any more affectionately than on Pedro and his little lot?"

"The government!" Señor Congosta repeated the words with the utmost scorn. "I will be frank with you, Sir Antony. The Republican government is doomed. Too long has that collection of traitors battered on my unfortunate country. It needs but one spark to kindle the flame, and—" With a sweep of his arm he indicated the painful and abrupt fate that was awaiting the President of Livadia and his advisers.

"I see," said Tony slowly. "Then your somewhat original method of calling is connected with State affairs?"

Señor Congosta spread out his hands. "There is no point in further concealment," he observed. "I think you will agree with me, Colonel Saltero, that we had better tell this gentleman the entire truth."

That Colonel grunted doubtfully, as though telling the entire truth were not a habit that he was accustomed to approve of, but the reply, such as it was, seemed good enough for his companion.

"For some time past," he said, "the Loyalists of Livadia have only been waiting their opportunity. The Republic is rotten—rotten to the core. It must soon fall like a bad fruit, and then—" he paused—

"then will come the chance for which we are ready."

"And for which," added Tony, "the Marquis da Freitas is also eminently ready."

Congosta's eyes gleamed. "So!" he said softly. "You know him?"

"Not intimately," said Tony: "just well enough to know that he is likely to be around when the prizes are given out."

Congosta nodded his head. A malevolent expression had crept into his face that made him look almost as sinister as the Colonel.

"It is with Da Freitas," he said slowly, "that we have to settle. With Da Freitas and one other. Until a month ago everything had been arranged for. We knew that here in England the usurper was plotting and planning for his restoration. We knew that he had many friends in the army and navy—that any moment the revolution might break out. But we were prepared. The very moment trouble came we intended to strike—and strike hard."

He stopped.

"What were you going to do?" asked Tony with interest.

"We should have seized the Palace before Da Freitas' hirelings and traitors were ready, and proclaimed Francisco's daughter as the rightful heir to the throne."

There was another pause.

"It was a good idea," said Tony; "but I gather there has been a slight hitch somewhere."

"We were betrayed," said Congosta sullenly.

"We made the mistake of trusting to a coward and a fool. It is the price that one always pays for such mistakes."

"Who was the gentleman?" asked Tony innocently.

"It was the King's brother-in-law—the Count de Sé. He was left guardian to the Princess Isabella under his late Majesty's will. All along he has pretended to work with us; and then, a month ago, he came secretly to England and betrayed the whole of our purpose to Da Freitas."

There was a sulphurous snort from Colonel Saltero, as though the mere mention of the incident were altogether too much for his feelings.

"We should be thankful," went on Congosta bitterly, "that the Princess is still alive. Da Freitas is not particular when his own interests are at stake. Had it suited him—" he made an expressive gesture with his hands. "As it is he seems to have thought the Count's plan equally effective—and perhaps healthier for himself. Why should not Pedro marry the Princess? Then when the revolution came there would only be one claimant to the throne of Livadia, and all our plans would be flung to the ground."

"It seems to me," said Tony thoughtfully, "that the Count de Sé is what we call a dirty dog in this country. All the same I don't quite see what he was driving at. Surely it would have suited his book better for Isabella to be queen in her own right."

“He was afraid,” said Congosta scornfully. “He is a coward, and he was afraid there would be fighting, and perhaps failure. He has no heart for such things. It seemed to him better to live under the shelter of Da Freitas.”

“He will not live long,” growled the Colonel ominously.

“As soon as we learned what had happened,” continued Congosta, “we had a council at Portriga, and it was decided that the Colonel and I should come to England. We have friends and agents here and it was not difficult to find out where the Count was living. I took a room at Richmond, and for a week I watched and waited in the hope of speaking with the Princess. I was convinced that she knew nothing of what was happening in Livadia—that she probably believed her father’s friends were dead or powerless. The first day I discovered she was there, but as for speaking with her—” he shrugged his shoulders—“there was an old hag of a French woman who never left her—who watched her like a cat. Then at last came the evening when she left the house—alone. At first I was on my guard; I feared that Da Freitas might have learned I was in Richmond; that he was using this means to draw me into a trap. It was only when she got to the station and hid in the waiting-room that I began to suspect she was running away. I did not speak with her then; I did not wish to alarm her. I knew she was going to Waterloo, because I had listened when she asked for her ticket. So while I waited I sent off a tele-

gram to Saltero to meet me there, and I too came up to London in the same train."

He paused again, half out of breath from the rapidity with which he had been speaking.

"I think I have a good working idea of the rest of the story," said Tony. He slipped off the table and stood up facing his two prisoners. "I owe you an apology," he added, "both of you. I am afraid that in our anxiety to assist the Princess, Bugg and I have been rather unnecessarily strenuous."

Congosta rose to his feet and bowed gravely. "Sir Antony Conway," he said. "You behaved as I should expect an English nobleman to behave under the circumstances. Neither Colonel Saltero nor myself bear you any ill will for the slight inconvenience we have suffered."

The Colonel, who seemed to be a man of less expansive habit, grunted again, but Tony did not allow this apparent lack of enthusiasm to damp the graciousness of Congosta's speech.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have been frank with me, and I will be equally frank with you. When I came to the assistance of Princess Isabella, I had not the remotest notion who she was. I acted on the impulse of the moment, as I suppose any one else would have acted. Out of gratitude for this very slight service, the Princess was good enough to take me into her confidence. When I found that she was being forced into a marriage for which she had the strongest possible dislike, I naturally determined to put a stop to it. I have my own reasons

for not regarding Pedro as a suitable husband for her, apart altogether from the fact that she hates the sight of him. If it will relieve your minds in any way I can assure you that she will be quite safe from him as long as she will do me the honour of accepting my assistance."

It was the Colonel's turn to answer. "That is well," he said. "We are obliged to you for what you have done, but the affair cannot remain so. We must speak with the Princess. She must be informed of the high destiny that awaits her."

"That is a point," said Tony politely, "on which I am not quite in agreement with you, Colonel. The Princess has placed herself under my guardianship and I should be neglecting my duty if I encouraged her to mix herself up with an attempted revolution. I consider it a very unhealthy profession for a girl of her age."

The Colonel glared at him. "Sir!" he stammered. "Do you dare to thrust yourself in between the throne of Livadia and its Divinely appointed occupant?"

"Oh, no," said Tony cheerfully; "I don't go as far as that. When you have managed to make the throne vacant, I shall be very pleased to advise the Princess to step into it. Until then she is much happier and safer in Hampstead."

"I am inclined to think that Sir Antony Conway may be right, Colonel," broke in the voice of Señor Congosta. "The Princess's welfare must be our first consideration. To take her to Livadia at

present is out of the question, and I don't know any place where she would be safer from Da Freitas than in this house. We have had personal proof of the excellence of Sir Antony's arrangements. As for her being identified in any way with our plans—"he paused—"well, the Republican government has been recognized by England, and it would be madness on our part to give them any avoidable cause for complaint."

There was still a doubtful frown upon the Colonel's brow.

"I do not approve of the situation," he said stiffly. "It is not fitting that the future Queen of Livadia should be living in this house—unchaperoned and unprotected."

With a solemn face Tony drew himself up to his full height.

"Sir!" he said. "You forget that you are addressing a member of the English nobility."

The magnificence of the retort seemed to have a temporarily paralysing effect upon the Colonel, and before he could recover Señor Congosta, who was evidently the directing brain of the two, had taken the matter into his own hands.

"It is well spoken," he said with another low bow. "Sir Antony Conway—on behalf of my country, permit me to express the confidence and gratitude with which we accept your assistance."

CHAPTER XII

MOLLY BECOMES AN ALLY

GUY sat in his chair, and for a moment surveyed the admirably kept garden of Goodman's Rest with a thoughtful frown. Then his gaze travelled back to Tony and Isabel.

"We are in an extraordinary situation," he observed slowly.

It was just at half-past ten in the morning, and they were all of them sitting on the lawn at the back of the house, in a pleasant blaze of spring sunshine which streamed down out of a cloudless blue sky. Tony, who was smoking a cigar, had just finished giving his cousin a full and spirited description of his interview with Congosta and Saltero, for by the time he had returned to the house on the previous evening, Guy, who had been suffering from a slight headache, had already gone to bed.

"I don't see anything so very extraordinary about it," said Tony placidly. "Everybody seems to me to be behaving in a most natural and reasonable manner. In fact I am just a bit disappointed. I always thought that people who went in for revolu-

tions and that kind of thing were much more mysterious and exciting."

"Well, I don't know what you want!" retorted Guy. "You appear to have got both the Royalists and the Franciscans on your track, and as far as sticking at trifles goes, I shouldn't imagine there was much to choose between any of the parties in Livadia."

"You must remember that you are speaking of Isabel's native land," protested Tony reprovingly.

"Oh, he can say what he likes about Livadia," said Isabel. "It's all true."

"And anyhow," went on Guy, "if we mean to get out of this business safely and successfully we must look at things exactly as they are and not as they ought to be. As far as I can see the whole affair is more like a cheap melodrama than anything else, but that doesn't mean there isn't a very real danger for people who choose to mix themselves up in it." He paused. "What was your final understanding with these—these people?"

"Oh, we parted the best of friends," said Tony cheerfully. "At least Congosta and I did. The Colonel was a little bit stuffy at not being allowed to see Isabel, but I put that down to his military training. A good soldier never likes to be baulked in his object."

"Yes, yes; but what are they going to do?" persisted Guy. "You must have come to some sort of an arrangement."

"We came to a very good arrangement," said

Tony. "I am to continue looking after Isabel and keeping her away from the fascinations of Peter, while they go on with the job of getting the throne ready for her. The Colonel is on his way back to Livadia already."

"And what about the other man—Congosta?"

"Congosta is staying on in England for the present. I have got his address at Richmond. He says it's necessary that someone should be here in order to keep an eye on Peter and Da Freitas. I don't suppose he altogether trusts me either."

"I daresay he doesn't," observed Guy drily. "He probably agreed to the arrangement because he hadn't any immediate choice in the matter. I shouldn't imagine that we could depend on him in the least."

"I don't know," said Tony. "He seems to have a great faith in the virtue and nobility of the English aristocracy. I think he must be a reader of Charles Garvice."

"Have you made any plans yourself?" asked Guy.

Tony took a thoughtful pull at his cigar. "Well, I have got one or two ideas that I was talking over with Isabel last night. In the first place I think I shall tell Aunt Fanny all about it. It's just the sort of thing that would appeal to her thoroughly; and then she would be an excellent chaperone if we happened to want one."

Guy pondered over the suggestion for a moment. "I think you are right," he admitted half reluc-

tantly. "We certainly ought to have someone for—for Isabel's sake," (it was the first time he had dropped the more formal Miss Francis) "and I suppose Aunt Fanny is the only possible person. All the same the fewer people who know anything about it the better."

"I don't propose to tell any one else," said Tony, "except Molly. Oh, it's all right," he added, as Guy directed an embarrassed glance towards their companion; "I told Isabel all about Molly last night. She has survived the shock splendidly."

"I am not a child, Cousin Guy," said Isabel with dignity.

"But is it necessary to bring this—this young woman in?" objected Guy.

"Of course it is," said Tony, "and I wish you wouldn't refer to her in that dreadful way. It sounds as if she wore black cotton gloves. Molly's our Chief Intelligence Department. It's only through her that we can get any idea of what's going on at Richmond, and apart from that she is the best friend we could possibly have. She regards Peter as her private property—a poor thing, but her own—and she doesn't mean to lose him without a good scrap. She's got grit and nerve, Molly has; otherwise she wouldn't be playing lead at the Gaiety."

"Very well," said Guy resignedly. "I suppose that if one goes in for this sort of thing one must get help where one can. When do you propose to see her?"

"Now," said Tony; "if she's out of bed. I am going to motor down there right away." He got up from his chair. "You will be careful while I am away, won't you, Isabel?" he added. "Bugg is on duty all right, but I think it would be safer for you to stop in the garden unless you want to go back to the house. One doesn't know what Da Freitas may be up to."

"Isabel will be quite safe," said Guy with some spirit. "I will remain with her myself if she will allow me to."

"That will be very nice," said Isabel graciously.

Tony tossed away the stump of his cigar. "I believe that Guy will end by being the most reckless adventurer of the lot of us," he said gravely. "It's generally the way when people take up a fresh hobby late in life."

Isabel gave one of her little rippling laughs, and before Guy could think of an adequate retort, Tony had sauntered off up the path in the direction of the garage.

Amongst the hobbies of Miss Molly Monk that of early rising—as Tony knew—occupied a comparatively modest place, and he was accordingly not surprised on reaching her flat to learn from Claudine, the French maid, that her mistress was still in bed.

"Is she awake?" he inquired.

"*Mais oui, M'sieur,*" replied Claudine. "She 'ave 'er morning chocolate. I just take it in to 'er."

"Well, will you go and give her my love," said

Tony, "and tell her I should like to see her as soon as it could be happily managed."

Claudine conducted Tony to the little drawing-room, and then tripped demurely away down the passage to deliver her message. She was not absent for long, as thirty seconds could hardly have elapsed before she re-entered the apartment.

"If M'sieur will follow me," she announced. "Madem'selle will receive him."

She led the way to Molly's bedroom, and pushing open the door which was already ajar, ushered Tony into a charming atmosphere of cream walls, apple green hangings, and a huge brass bedstead.

In the bedstead was Molly. She was sitting up against a little mountain of white pillows, with a Japanese kimona thrown lightly round her gossamer nightdress, and her red hair streaming loose over her shoulders. She was sipping chocolate, and looked very cool and attractive.

"Hello, Tony," she said. "I hope you don't mind being received in this shameless fashion. It's your own fault you know for coming so early."

She extended a slim white hand and wrist, and Tony having implanted a kiss on the latter, seated himself comfortably on the end of the bed.

"I am not seriously annoyed, Molly," he replied. "I find that my naturally Calvinistic principles are becoming broader as I get older." He looked at her with an approving glance. "Besides," he went on, "at one time it was all the fashion to receive distinguished visitors in bed. Madame du Barry—a

very highly connected French lady—made a hobby of it.”

“Did she—the saucy puss!” said Molly. She pushed across a tortoise shell cigarette case that was lying on the silk coverlet in front of her. “You can light up if you like,” she added. “I am going to have one myself in a minute.”

Tony took advantage of her permission, and leaning back against the brass rail blew out a little spiral of grey smoke.

“I came at this indelicate hour,” he observed, “because I promised I would look round directly I had anything to tell you.”

Molly sat up in bed. “Oh,” she exclaimed eagerly, “have you heard from that friend of yours—the one in Portriga?”

Tony shook his head. “Not yet; there hasn’t been time.” He paused. “I don’t know that it’s altogether necessary to go to Portriga for news though. One seems to be able to pick up a certain amount of Livadian gossip in London.”

Molly put down her cup of chocolate on the tray beside her. “Tony,” she said, “what have you heard?”

“It’s a long and poignant story,” said Tony. “Are you in any hurry to get up?”

“Do I look like it?” She reached across the bed for the cigarette case. “Wait a moment till I’ve got a light; then I shan’t interrupt you.”

She struck a match, and drawing in a mouthful of smoke, leaned back against the pillows.

"That's better," she observed contentedly. "Now fire ahead."

The art of telling a long story well is a regrettably rare one, especially amongst people who are chiefly addicted to the habit. Tony, however, undoubtedly possessed it to a certain extent, and in the present case he enjoyed the additional advantage of having already practised upon Guy. Starting from his meeting with Isabel in Long Acre, he recounted in that pleasantly unhurried fashion of his the whole of the spirited events which had led up to his present visit. He concealed nothing—not even his deception of Isabel in connection with the pawning of her brooch, for if Molly was to be accepted as an active ally, it was obviously necessary that there should be no half measures about the matter. Besides, Tony, who preferred his own judgment to any one else's, considered Molly to be one of the most trustworthy people he had ever met.

She was at all events an irreproachable listener. Lying back against the pillows, her hands clasped behind her head, she followed his narrative with an absorbed interest that showed itself plainly in her eyes. She made no attempt to interrupt him or to ask questions—indeed with the exception of occasionally knocking off the ash of her cigarette into the breakfast tray, she remained as motionless and silent as a Kirchner picture.

"And that," observed Tony in conclusion, "is as far as we've got to at present. At least it's all I

know for certain. Of course I may get back to find that Guy and Isabel have been murdered in the garden." He rose from the bed, and crossing to the fireplace tossed away the stump of his cigarette, which he had allowed to go out. "Well, what do you say, Molly?" he added cheerfully. "Are you prepared to come in with us, and do your bit in saving Peter from bigamy?"

Molly sat up in bed, her blue eyes gleaming with a brisk and businesslike determination.

"I should think I was," she observed crisply. "If any one imagines I've taken all the trouble of training and educating Peter for nothing, they're making a fat mistake." She shook back her hair with a resolute gesture that spoke volumes for her sincerity. "Tony," she said, "you're a brick. I really don't know how to thank you."

"There's nothing to thank me for," said Tony. "I have taken up the case in the interests of European morals. I don't approve of a young man marrying, when he already has a wife in the sight of Heaven."

"Not only in the sight of Heaven," returned Molly with spirit. "In the sight of the Registrar of Chelmsford as well."

There was a brief pause. "Good Lord!" said Tony slowly. "Is that a fact?"

Molly half jumped up in bed, and then sitting down again, pulled up the counterpane.

"I can't get out," she said, "this nightdress isn't respectable. Just go to the dressing-table, Tony—

there's a dear—and open that top drawer on the right. You'll find a jewel-case inside—a brown one."

Tony did as he was commanded, and took out a small Russia leather box, with Molly's initials in gold stamped upon the lid.

"Here you are," she said, holding out her hand. "Now give me that little bunch of keys by the brush."

She opened the box, and rummaging inside extracted a slip of paper, which she unfolded and glanced through before handing it to Tony.

"How about that?" she inquired with a sort of dispassionate triumph.

Tony took the document, and sitting down again on the foot of the bed, spread it out in front of him. It was the ordinary registrar's form of marriage certificate, dated at Chelmsford six months previously, and it set out in the restrained but convincing style adopted by such authors, that on the date in question Mary Monk, daughter of John Monk, game-keeper, and Pedro da Talles, son of Pedro da Talles, gentleman, had seen fit to enter into the bonds of Holy Matrimony.

Tony read it through with an interest that he seldom devoted to current literature, and then looked up with an expression of deep admiration.

"You're a wonderful person, Molly," he said.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I'm not under any mistaken ideas about its value," she replied coolly. "I know it wouldn't cut any ice in Livadia—and I expect it's about equally useless here. You see in the first place Pedro isn't allowed to marry any one

except a Royalty, and then of course this paper's all out of order. You see we had to keep it dark who Peter really was, or of course the news would have been all over the shop. Fortunately no ordinary person in England knows his family name, so there wasn't much chance of anybody spotting the entry. The only thing was we couldn't describe his father as a king—that would have busted the show hopelessly—so we had to put him down as a gentleman. I expect that's enough to make it illegal by itself."

"I should think so," said Tony. "It's certainly a very misleading description, judging by popular rumour." He paused. "What made you do it, Molly, and how did you manage to bring it off?"

"Oh, it was easy enough," replied Molly a little contemptuously. "I believe I could make Peter do almost anything. He's frightfully fond of me in his way." She leaned forward and picked up the paper. "I don't really know why I bothered about it," she added thoughtfully. "I think it was partly just to show myself I could, and partly—" she stopped and laughed—"well, Granddad used to be a churchwarden at Helbeck, you know, and right underneath everything I think I've got some secret strain of lower middle-class respectability."

"I am glad it hasn't hampered your taste in nightdresses," said Tony. "That would have been a tragedy." He helped himself to another cigarette. "Well, you're going to come in with us and battle for your rights, then?" he added.

"Every time," observed Molly with decision.

"I know where I am now, and that will make all the difference. Up till to-day I have sort of been fighting in the dark."

"Have you seen Peter again?" inquired Tony.

Molly nodded. "He was here yesterday. He wouldn't tell me anything, but I could see he was nearly worried out of his life. I don't believe it's entirely about this girl—I am sure from the way he spoke that things are coming to a head out in Livadia."

"I expect they are," said Tony. "You can't work up a revolution and then postpone it like a mothers' meeting. Isabel's disappearance must have made Da Freitas as mad as a wet hen. It's come just at the wrong moment."

"Is this girl really so like me?" asked Molly.

"Wonderfully," said Tony; "considering how rare beauty is. She has got brown eyes instead of blue, but any one who was short-sighted or a little intoxicated might easily mistake her for you. Probably that's why Peter wanted to kiss her that night after dinner."

Molly looked a little sceptical. "Peter will kiss anybody," she said, "especially when he's had a drink or two." She paused. "Still, I don't think I like her being quite so like me," she added thoughtfully.

"It can't be helped," said Tony. "I expect Heaven had some of the material left over, and didn't want to waste it."

"Oh, I'm not worrying really," replied Molly.

"I've become a sort of habit to Peter. He would be absolutely lost without me now. He said as much himself yesterday, and he's not given to making pretty speeches. You see I'm the only girl he has ever known who was really fond of him for his own sake. All the rest have been absolute rotters."

"He doesn't deserve his luck," said Tony severely. "It's incredible that any one could be so stupid as to prefer sitting on a throne in Livadia to stopping in London and making love to you."

"Oh, it's not his fault," protested Molly. "It's all that old pig Da Freitas. Peter knows perfectly well he is not fit to be a king. I have told him so again and again, and in his heart he absolutely agrees with me. He always makes a mess of things if I'm not there to look after him."

Tony got up from the bed. "It's really a work of pure benevolence that we're engaged on," he observed. "We might almost christen ourselves the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Peter, and appeal for a public subscription." He picked up his hat off the chair. "Well anyhow, Molly," he added, "from to-day we shall consider you one of us, and keep you posted up in everything that goes on."

"Right-oh," replied Molly cheerfully, "and the same here. I am quite sure that if Peter is going to do anything very desperate he'll let me know about it in spite of Da Freitas. Anyhow, it won't be my fault if he doesn't."

"I don't suppose it will," said Tony.

He bent down and implanted a kiss just under her

chin, which Molly considerably elevated for the purpose, and then, after having bestowed half a sovereign upon Claudine who glided out into the hall to open the front door for him, he clambered back into his car and set off on the return journey.

Having arrived home he drove up to the garage, and leaving the car in the care of Jennings, walked down the path on to the lawn where he had left Guy and Isabel. The chairs they had been sitting on were still there, but there was no sign of their late occupants. Thinking that perhaps another botany lesson was in progress, Tony strolled on round the garden, but except for a white whiskered gentleman who was doing something mysterious with a spade, the place seemed to be deserted. He returned to the house, and entering the morning-room by the open French window rang the bell for Spalding.

"They have gone across to number sixteen, Sir Antony," replied the latter in answer to his inquiry. "Miss Francis wished to return before lunch, and Mr. Guy told me to inform you that he and Bugg had walked across with her. They will be back by one o'clock."

There was a pause.

"I suppose you heard about our little entertainment there yesterday?" said Tony.

Spalding inclined his head. "Mrs. Spalding informed me of the facts, sir. They appear to have made a considerable impression upon her."

"Mrs. Spalding was magnificent," said Tony. "It's quite impossible to frighten her."

"Quite, sir," agreed Spalding. "I have observed that myself, sir."

"I hope you don't object, Spalding," said Tony. "I don't think we did any harm to your property."

"That's perfectly all right, sir," replied the butler. "I trust that you will consider yourself quite at home there. The house is fully insured."

"Thank you, Spalding," said Tony. "You are always very obliging."

Spalding acknowledged the compliment with another grave bow, and picking up the current copy of the *Auto Car*, which contained a description of the last Brooklands meeting, Tony sauntered out again on to the lawn.

Here he established himself comfortably in a basket-chair, and after lighting a pipe, opened the paper at the article in question. It was enriched with several complimentary references to himself and his driving, and Tony, who liked to hear agreeable sentiments expressed about any one that he was fond of, read it through with appreciative interest. He had just finished, and was lying back in the sunshine in a pleasant state of contentment with the Universe, when the French window opened and Spalding came down on to the lawn, carrying a small silver salver, containing a couple of visiting cards. He advanced to where Tony was sitting.

"Two gentlemen have called, sir, and would like to see you."

Tony took out his pipe and shook off the ash on to the grass.

“What are their names, Spalding?” he inquired.

The butler glanced at the cards as if to refresh his memory.

“They are two foreign gentlemen, Sir Antony. The Marquis da Freitas, and the Count de Sé.”

CHAPTER XIII

A MOVE BY THE ENEMY

THERE was a moment's pause, and then in a leisurely fashion Tony knocked the remaining tobacco out of his pipe, and put it away in his pocket.

"How jolly!" he observed. "What have you done with them?"

"I have shown them into the library, Sir Antony."

Tony got up from his chair and pulled down his coat.

"Do I look respectable, Spalding?" he asked. "I shouldn't like to receive such distinguished visitors with any suggestion of slovenliness."

Spalding inspected him carefully, and then stepping forward removed a small piece of white thread from the knee of his trousers.

"There is nothing the matter now, Sir Antony," he replied.

Tony walked leisurely up the steps into the house, and crossing the morning-room and the hall, opened the door of the library.

Da Freitas and the Count, both irreproachably dressed in frock coats, were standing on the hearth-rug.

"Hulloa, Marquis!" observed Tony. "This is awfully nice of you to come and look me up. A sort of burying of the pugilistic hatchet, eh?"

With an affable bow the Marquis accepted his proffered hand.

"It is my hope that we shall always be good friends," he replied in that smooth purring voice of his. Then indicating his companion, he added: "May I have the honour of presenting you to the Count de Sé?"

Tony shook hands in turn with the Count, who in contrast with the urbane Da Freitas appeared nervous and ill at ease.

"How do you do?" said Tony. "I suppose it's my imagination, but d'you know I can't help feeling I have seen you before somewhere."

For a moment the Count seemed at a loss how to reply, and before he could recover himself the Marquis da Freitas had taken up the gauntlet.

"You are right, Sir Antony. You made the Count's acquaintance in Richmond Park the day before yesterday. It is that meeting to a certain extent which is responsible for our visit."

With an air of pleased remembrance, Tony turned back to Isabel's guardian.

"Why, of course," he exclaimed. "How stupid of me! I say, I hope you didn't hurt yourself when you fell off the car?"

The Count drew himself up. "It is through a miracle that I was not killed," he replied with some stiffness.

Tony nodded sympathetically. "I know," he said. "That's the danger of a clay soil. It gets so hard in hot weather."

A sudden tinge of colour appeared in the Count's parchment-like face, and once again the soothing tones of Da Freitas broke in upon the conversation.

"I expect," he said suavely, "that we have all been more or less under a misunderstanding. I am quite sure that when matters are explained this little Comedy of Errors will settle itself."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tony. "But won't you both sit down and have a cigar? There's no reason we shouldn't be comfortable while we are talking."

He took a box off the mantelpiece and held it out in turn to his two guests. Da Freitas helped himself, and after a second's hesitation the Count followed suit, as though the tempting appearance of the cabanas that it contained had proved too strong for his contemplated refusal.

It was Da Freitas who reopened the conversation. Having seated himself on the broad leather-covered couch against the wall, he took an appreciative pull at his cigar, and then removed it carefully from between his thick lips.

"I suppose," he said, "that you are aware who the young lady is that you have apparently been good-natured enough to assist?"

It was the identical question that Congosta had opened with, and Tony answered it in much the same fashion.

"Why, of course," he said. "When I make new friends I am always most careful about their antecedents."

The Marquis looked up at him sharply, but Tony's face remained absolutely expressionless.

"As you may imagine," continued the former, "it was a cause of infinite relief to the Count and myself to learn that her foolish escapade had had no more serious consequences." He paused. "We should be interested to learn how and under what circumstances you became acquainted."

"We were introduced by a mutual acquaintance in Long Acre," said Tony.

The Marquis raised his eyebrows. "Ah, indeed!" he replied courteously. "I had no idea that Isabella had any acquaintances in London. That was one thing that made us so extremely anxious about her."

He paused again as though giving Tony an opportunity to be a little more communicative—a thoughtful attention which the latter appeared to overlook.

"I suppose," he continued with a good-natured laugh, "that the dear foolish child has been telling you of the terrible tragedies of a high destiny. She is incredibly romantic as you have doubtless seen. It's a charming weakness in a young girl, but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"well, sometimes we poor elders are forced to appear unsympathetic in order to be kind."

"Yes," said Tony, "so I gather."

Again the Marquis glanced at him quickly, and then as if partly reassured by the perfect tranquillity

of his countenance, proceeded in the same strain of benevolent urbanity.

"To youth the claims of duty must always seem hard and unreasonable. One would not wish it otherwise. If we were not a little unwise and impatient in the spring-time of life, what interest would be left to us for the autumn and the winter?" He took another pull at his cigar, and blew out a philosophic cloud of smoke. "I presume," he added smilingly, "that you are fully acquainted with the main cause of our little runaway's desperate decision?"

"I understand," said Tony, "that she was unable to appreciate the more subtle points of her selected husband?"

Da Freitas waved his hand indulgently. "Ah, well, my dear Sir Antony, between ourselves I do not mind admitting that His Majesty is not perhaps the figure of Romance that a young girl pictures in her dreams. But what would you? He loves her devotedly, and he will make her a good—an excellent husband. It will be an ideal marriage in every way."

"You really think so?" said Tony artlessly.

"I am sure of it. Why should I have encouraged it otherwise? We have nothing to gain politically by such a match. His Majesty might have made an alliance with one of the most powerful reigning houses in Europe, but he loves his cousin, and I am old-fashioned enough to believe that when there is no great objection it is best to follow the counsels of the heart."

"But there is a grave objection" said Tony, "—on the lady's part."

Again Da Freitas shrugged his shoulders. "My dear Sir Antony—a young girl's whims and fancies! What are they anyway? Three parts shyness and modesty. Within a week of her marriage she will be perfectly happy and contented."

Tony leaned back and crossed his legs. "Well, I'll tell her what you say," he observed, "but I am afraid I can't hold out much hope."

There was a short and rather pregnant silence.

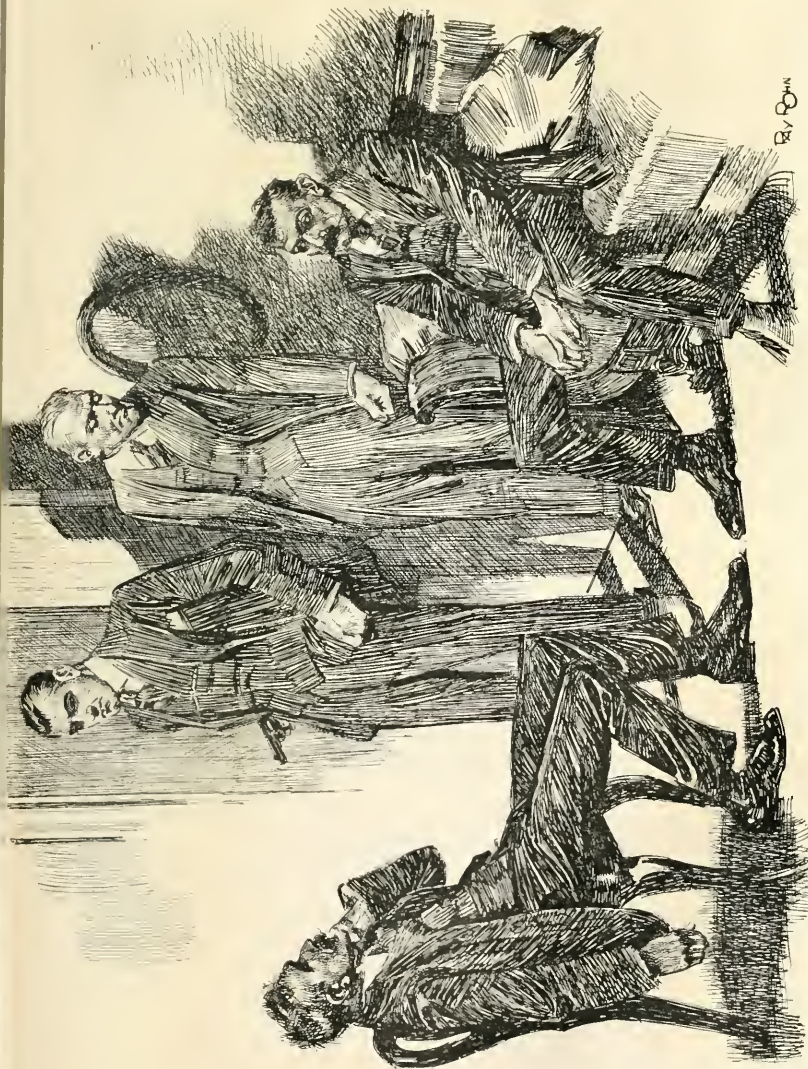
"The position does not appear to be quite clear to you, Sir Antony," remarked Da Freitas with a somewhat excessive politeness. "While we appreciate your friendly offer of assistance, there can be no question of our sending messages through any third party. The Count de Sé is Her Highness's legal guardian, and the sooner she is returned to his care and protection, the better it will be for everybody concerned."

"I daresay," replied Tony lazily; "but you see there's a difficulty in the way. She dislikes him even more than she does you and Pedro."

Da Freitas controlled himself admirably.

"It is scarcely a question of Her Highness's personal feelings," he observed. "I fancy that we are the best judges of her future welfare, and in any case the present state of affairs cannot possibly be allowed to continue."

"I don't see why," persisted Tony cheerfully. "I have adopted Isabel as a cousin, and the arrange-



R. D. W.

His gaze finally came to rest on the barrel of the Mauser pistol. "Feeling better?" inquired Tony kindly. An obvious train of recollection flashed across the stranger's face. "I remember now," he muttered. "Something struck me—something on the stairs."



ment suits us both excellently. Of course I am sorry in a way that Pedro should be disappointed, but after all it only serves him right. I don't approve of a young man marrying a nice girl, unless he has led a healthy and reputable life."

This was too much for the Count de Sé, who started up in his chair with an indignant gasp.

"Sir!" he exclaimed. "You are insolent."

Tony looked across at him with perfect good temper.

"We are all insolent in England," he said. "It's the result of there being no duelling."

"Sir Antony is indulging his sense of humour," broke in Da Freitas with a dangerous suavity. "We can hardly insult his intelligence by suggesting that he is taking up this position seriously. Otherwise it might be necessary to remind him that in this great and admirable country of his there is such a thing as the Law."

"I have been told," said Tony, "that it is our supreme national achievement."

"It is at least effective," replied Da Freitas with some significance. "I understand that it takes a very definite view as to the detention of a minor from her legal guardian."

"There is only one trouble about the law in England," said Tony. "It's inclined to be slow in its operation."

Da Freitas' white teeth exhibited themselves in a smile.

"That," he observed, "is a universal weakness in

legal systems, but fortunately there are ways and methods of overcoming it. In the present case, for instance, I fancy that a few words from me to your extremely courteous and obliging Foreign Office might have a very far-reaching effect."

"I am sure they would," said Tony cordially. "In fact I shouldn't be the least surprised if they reached as far as Livadia. It's extraordinary how news travels—especially interesting and romantic news of this sort."

Once again there was a pause in the conversation. Then Da Freitas laughed—easily and pleasantly.

"If that remark is intended for a threat, I am afraid that your information is a little out of date. His Majesty's intentions are already known to the government at Portriga."

Tony shook his head. "I wasn't thinking so much about the government," he said. "It was the friends and supporters of the late Don Francisco that I had in my mind. I've got an idea that some of them might like to come over to Richmond and congratulate the Count on having arranged such a satisfactory marriage."

The effect that this innocent remark produced upon Isabel's uncle was prompt and remarkable. His naturally unpleasant complexion went a sort of dirty green, and flinging his half-smoked cigar on the carpet he rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Are we to sit here and be threatened and insulted any longer?" he demanded.

"Apparently not," said Tony, "but all the same there's no need to burn a hole in my nice carpet."

With a masterful gesture Da Freitas checked his companion's outburst. Then he too rose from the sofa, and stood facing Tony with the same easy and smiling urbanity that he had displayed all through the interview.

"We are flattered at your interest in the affairs of our afflicted country, Sir Antony; but if you will forgive my offering you a little advice, it is a dangerous habit to make a plaything out of what other people take seriously."

Tony stepped to the fireplace and pressed the electric bell.

"All real pleasure seems to have a certain amount of risk about it," he admitted sadly. "The only thing to do is to hope for the best and take every proper precaution."

The Marquis picked up his hat from the table on which he had placed it.

"I have heard more foolish remarks," he observed, "from considerably wiser people."

There was a sound outside, and then the door opened and Spalding appeared on the threshold.

Tony turned to his guests. "Have you got a car?" he inquired, "or can my man drive you anywhere?"

Da Freitas bowed. "You are very kind," he said, "but there is no need to trouble you. We are in the fortunate position of being able to look after ourselves—in every way."

He walked to the door, followed by the Count de Sé, who haughtily ignored Tony's polite farewell. Leaning against the mantelpiece the latter waited placidly until he heard the grind and scrunch of the departing car, and then strolling out into the hall discovered Spalding in the act of closing the front door.

"Have Miss Francis and Mr. Guy come back yet?" he inquired.

"Yes, Sir Antony," replied Spalding. "They returned a few minutes ago and are waiting in the garden. I took the liberty of informing them who your visitors were. You had given no instructions, but I thought you might wish them to know."

"It's a waste of time giving you instructions, Spalding," said Tony. "Your instincts are so invariably accurate."

Spalding, as usual, acknowledged the compliment with a slight bow.

"Would you wish lunch to be served, sir?" he inquired. "Or shall I put it off for a quarter of an hour?"

"Oh, no, you can bring it up," said Tony. "I want support. There is something very exhausting about the foreign aristocracy."

He strolled out into the garden, where Isabel and Guy, who were back in their old seats, jumped up eagerly to meet him.

"Well?" they inquired simultaneously.

"Fairly so," said Tony, "considering what I have

been through. I had no idea that this conspiracy business was such an intellectual strain."

"Oh, what did Da Freitas say?" asked Isabel clasping her hands. "I could almost see him standing there smiling and threatening you in that horrible smooth way of his."

"He was in quite good form," said Tony cheerfully, "and so was Uncle Phil." He put his arm through hers. "But come along in and I'll tell you all about it while we are having some food. We mustn't allow our pleasures to interfere with the more serious duties of life."

They made their way to the dining-room, where Spalding was just bringing in lunch, and over an excellent saddle of mutton Tony gave them a leisurely but animated description of his recent interview.

"I don't know what you think," he finished, "but my own idea is that Da Freitas was skidding a little from the truth when he said that the Republican government knew all about Peter's matrimonial plans. I don't see how they can, unless Congosta's people have told them, and that isn't likely."

"They may have spies of their own," suggested Guy. "They must know that the King is plotting to come back, and you can be pretty sure that they are keeping an eye on him some way or other." He paused. "I wonder what Da Freitas will do next!" he added.

"We needn't worry ourselves," said Tony. "We shall find out before very long. I never saw a middle-

aged nobleman more obviously bent upon immediate mischief."

Isabel nodded her agreement. "He always has some plan ready if another one fails. In Livadia when he was Prime Minister they used to call him the Black Spider."

"Do you think he knows where Isabel is?" asked Guy.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tony placidly. "He gave me the impression of having several aces up his sleeve."

Guy frowned thoughtfully. "I don't think it's very safe leaving her at Spalding's with only Bugg to look after her. These people have big interests at stake and they won't mind what methods they employ."

"No," said Tony, "to do Da Freitas justice I shouldn't think there was any maudlin fastidiousness about him." He paused to mix himself a whisky and soda. "I am inclined to think you're right, Guy. The best thing with these strong, unscrupulous men is to put temptation out of their reach."

"How do you propose to do it?" asked Guy.

"I shall go along this afternoon to Aunt Fanny and see if I can't persuade her to ask Isabel to come and stay. She ought to be quite safe there. No one would ever think of looking for a Queen in Chester Square. It's so respectable."

"I seem to be getting more of a bother than ever," observed Isabel in rather a distressed voice.

"Not at all," said Guy firmly. "Every right-minded person finds it a pleasure and a privilege to prevent injustice being done."

"Especially to any one beautiful," added Tony. "It's wonderful how beauty quickens one's ethical sense." He turned to Isabel. "How would you like to go to a music hall to-night?" he asked.

"Very much," said Isabel promptly.

A faint cloud of disapproval showed itself on Guy's forehead.

"Don't you think a theatre would be more—more appropriate?" he asked.

"No," said Tony, "I don't. Isabel knows nothing of the deeper and better side of our English national life, and it's quite time she learned. I shall take her to the Empire." He paused. "I don't like leaving her alone all this afternoon though," he added thoughtfully. "I suppose you couldn't possibly snatch an hour or two, Guy——?"

"Oh, I shall be all right," interrupted Isabel hastily. "You mustn't think of putting yourself out for me, Cousin Guy."

Guy laid down his knife and fork. "My dear Isabel," he said in that precise and dignified manner of his; "when you know Tony as well as I do, you won't pay the faintest attention to his remarks. I am not the least busy this afternoon and I shall be only too pleased if you will accept my company."

"I shall be delighted," said Isabel, "but I am not really frightened of Da Freitas now. Look what I got yesterday."

She slipped her hand into an inside pocket of the tailormade coat that she was wearing, and pulled out a tiny little ivory-handled pistol, which she held out for Tony's inspection.

"It's one of Harrod's," she added, "I saw it in his list. Isn't it nice?"

"Charming," said Tony. "I had no idea that Harrod was so blood-thirsty."

"Is it loaded?" inquired Guy with a faint trace of anxiety.

"Oh, yes," said Isabel promptly. "Harrod says it will kill a man at ten yards."

"You ought to hit Da Freitas all right at ten yards," observed Tony critically. "He's very podgy."

"You mustn't encourage her in such ideas," broke in Guy. "We are not in Livadia or South America." He turned to Isabel. "People don't shoot at each other in England," he explained. "It's against the law and they would be very severely punished. You had better give me that to look after for you."

Isabel shook her head. "I shall shoot at him if he tries to take me back," she said with determination. "I would rather go to prison than marry Pedro."

"A very healthy and reasonable sentiment," remarked Tony. "Guy has the most morbid ideas about the sanctity of human life. He ought to belong to the National Liberal Club."

Isabel put back the pistol into her pocket, and

after one more unavailing effort Guy abandoned his protest as useless.

"I suppose it's on a par with the rest of the situation," he observed gloomily. "We shall probably all end in prison or something worse before we've finished."

Tony laughed and pushed across the whisky.

"Never mind, Guy," he replied in an encouraging voice. "We shall be able to look back on beautiful and well-spent lives, and that's the only thing that really matters."

It was close on four o'clock when Tony arrived at Chester Square, and was shown up to the drawing-room by Lady Jocelyn's trim and efficient-looking parlour-maid. Lady Jocelyn herself was sitting on the sofa reading one of Anatole France's earlier novels, and she shut the book up with a pleased smile as her visitor appeared on the threshold.

"Dear Tony," she said. "How nice of you to come so soon. I have been positively ill with curiosity. It's the only disease I can't bear with dignity."

Tony kissed her affectionately and sat down on the sofa beside her.

"I have brought you the cure, Aunt Fanny," he replied, "but I'm afraid it's rather an exhausting one. Do you feel strong enough to listen to a long and distressing story, involving some of the noblest names in Europe?"

"The longer and distressinger it is," said Lady Jocelyn, "the more I shall enjoy it." She stretched out her hand to a small table beside her, and pressed

an electric bell. "But perhaps we had better have tea up first," she added. "A cup of tea improves the best scandal in the world. It makes it seem more abandoned."

"I suppose that accounts for the great wealth of Lipton and Lyons," said Tony. "I had always put it down to their Scottish blood."

The neat parlour-maid returned, and having been requested to bring tea, duly performed that operation with the deftness and celerity that characterized all Lady Jocelyn's servants. Then, having received instructions that no other visitors were to be admitted, she retired gracefully from the scene, closing the door behind her.

"Now you can begin, Tony," said Lady Jocelyn, handing him one of her fragile Sèvres cups. "Speak slowly and don't omit any of the more painful details. I can bear anything provided it's sufficiently scandalous."

Thus encouraged Tony entered upon his task, and in practically the same words as he had already told it to Molly he repeated the moving story of his discovery of Isabel, and the bracing results which had sprung from their acquaintance. Lady Jocelyn listened to him with a silent but deep enjoyment which showed itself plainly in her twinkling black eyes. Like Molly she made no interruptions until he had finished, contenting herself with an occasional nod or an appreciative smile as the more interesting developments gradually unrolled themselves. When the whole story was finally concluded, she lay back

against the cushions and surveyed him with a sort of affectionate approval.

"My dear Tony," she said. "I have done you a great injustice. Ever since you were a small boy, I have admired your efforts at brightening the family life, but I never suspected you were capable of anything like this."

"I think I have always been a little misunderstood," answered Tony modestly. "Some people develop late, you know."

Lady Jocelyn laughed softly. "I can now depart in peace," she said. "If any one had told me that I should live to see Laura and Henry mixed up even remotely in a bloodthirsty European scandal—" She broke off, as if mere words were inadequate to express the depth of her emotions.

"It *is* rather joyous, isn't it?" said Tony. "Still it's their own fault, you know. They have been worrying me to take up some serious profession ever since the war."

"Well, they can't complain then," agreed Lady Jocelyn. "Kidnapping Queens is one of the most serious professions that any young man could possibly adopt." She arranged herself a little more comfortably on the sofa, and looked across at Tony with a smile. "And what about my part in the play?" she asked. "Am I to be the Fairy God-mother?"

For a moment Tony paused. "I don't know," he said. "Upon my soul I don't like to drag you into it, Aunt Fanny."

"Nonsense," retorted Lady Jocelyn briskly. "People of my age require a little mental stimulant to keep their interest in life alive." She paused. "Besides, you must think of the girl. Even a Princess's reputation has to be considered."

Tony nodded. "That's our weak point," he observed. "We've got a good hand, but we're a bit thin on chaperons."

"It's quite simple," said Lady Jocelyn. "You must bring her to stay with me. I am sure we should get along together excellently. I like girls with red hair."

"I did think of it," admitted Tony; "but you know, Aunt Fanny, it's really rather risky. Those sleek purring people like Da Freitas are dangerous beggars when they mean mischief."

"I am not frightened," answered Lady Jocelyn calmly. "There is a very reliable policeman at the corner, and the house is heavily insured." She laid down the piece of silk knitting which she had picked up after tea. "Tony," she said suddenly, "I have got an idea. If you are really determined to play the knight errant for this young woman, why don't you put that very comfortable steam yacht of yours into commission and take her away out of danger? If you will go to some nice place I don't mind coming with you and looking after the proprieties. I am very fond of a sea voyage even now."

Tony sat up and gazed at her with admiration.

"My dear Aunt Fanny!" he exclaimed. "That's not an idea. That's a stroke of pure genius." He

paused as if to allow the full brilliance of the suggestion to sink into him. "I could bring Guy too," he added, "and then we should have a four for bridge."

"If Guy would come," said Lady Jocelyn. "He probably considers the ocean not quite respectable."

"Oh, he'd come all right," said Tony. "He's getting much broader-minded, especially where Isabel's concerned." He got up from the sofa. "I will send a wire to Simmons on my way back. The *Betty* is in Southampton and it won't take more than a day or two to get her ready."

"You are going to bring Isabel to stay with me just the same, I suppose?" asked Lady Jocelyn. "Apart altogether from Mrs. Grundy, I should think it would be much safer for her to leave Hampstead. I expect Da Freitas knows where she is, and in that case she must be in a certain amount of danger."

Tony nodded. "I will bring her along myself to-morrow morning," he said. "The house is probably watched, but I shall take her a nice little run in the Peugeot first. I don't think any one will find out where we finish up." He paused. "You really are a darling, Aunt Fanny," he added. "I have no idea how to thank you."

Lady Jocelyn smiled at him placidly. "I will tell you, Tony," she said, "after I have seen Isabel."

There is a small confectioner's shop, not a hundred yards from Victoria Station, which for some dark purpose of his own the Post Master General has enriched with a Telegraph Office. Here Tony halted the car on his return journey, and sauntering

up to the desk inside, selected a form, which after some consideration he filled up with the following message:——

TO CAPTAIN SIMMONS,
Steam yacht *Betty*,
Southampton.

Please make all preparations immediate sailing. Party of six or seven including servants. Duration of voyage uncertain. Wire earliest date likely to be ready. Hope you're well.

CONWAY.

He handed it to the girl behind the counter, an anæmic young lady of about seventeen, who having read it carefully with the aid of a pencil, looked up at him with a rather wistful envy.

"One shilling and eightpence," she observed. Then in a low voice she added: "Wish I was comin' too. Some people have all the luck."

Tony put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a five-pound note. He glanced round, and seeing that no one was observing them, pushed it across the counter.

"Never mind, Gwendoline," he said encouragingly. "Pay for the telegram out of that, and try to keep the other nine commandments."

Then, before the astounded young lady had recovered her power of speech, he lifted his hat, and strolled off out of the shop in the same leisurely fashion as he had entered it.

CHAPTER XIV

A DISTURBANCE IN HAMPSTEAD

ISABEL gazed round the cheerful, brightly lighted little restaurant with a glance of complete contentment.

"I am quite sure father was wrong about our being the rightful heirs to the throne," she said. "Anyhow, I don't feel the least like a queen."

"You mustn't be so exacting," replied Tony. "You look like one; and that's all that any reasonable girl has any right to expect."

"Still," persisted Isabel, "I expect that proper kings and queens have a special sort of Royal feeling inside. I haven't got it in the least. I have been a thousand times happier since I ran away than I ever should be if I was stuck up on a throne. It's the silly pretence of it all that I should hate so. Even the sort of semi-state that we used to keep up when Father was alive nearly drove me mad. It was like being surrounded by a lot of stupid shadows. Do you know that except for Miss Watson, you and Cousin Guy are the first *real* people I have ever met."

"There are not many about," said Tony. "At least that's how it seems to me. I always feel as if I

was in the stalls of a theatre looking on at a play. The only real people are one's friends who are sitting alongside, criticizing and abusing it."

Isabel nodded. "It's the first time I have been in the audience," she said. "Up till now I haven't even done any acting. I have just been waiting behind the scenes as a sort of understudy."

They had just finished dinner and were dawdling pleasantly over coffee and cigarettes in the soothing atmosphere of the Café Bruges. They had chosen that discreet but excellent little restaurant as the one in which they were least likely to run across inconvenient acquaintances, since its clientèle consists almost entirely of Board of Trade officials, who take little interest in anything outside of their own absorbing profession. Compared with these deserving but sombre people Isabel looked very young and charming. The strained, hunted look had quite gone out of her face, and in the softly shaded light her amber eyes shone with a contented happiness that Tony found extremely attractive.

"I think you will find Aunt Fanny real enough," he said, tipping off the end of his cigarette into the saucer. "At least she always seems amazingly so to me."

"I am sure we shall get along together splendidly," said Isabel. "She sounds a dear from what you have told me about her."

"She is," replied Tony with as near an approach to enthusiasm as he ever attained. "She is the most complete and delightful aunt in the world. Fancy

an ordinary aunt of seventy-two offering to come with us on the *Betty!*"

"I am looking forward to it so much," exclaimed Isabel happily. "I love the sea. I should like to go right round the world and then back again."

Tony contemplated her with lazy enjoyment. "Well, there's nothing to stop us," he said, "unless Aunt Fanny or Guy object. I am afraid it's not quite Guy's idea of a really useful and intelligent employment."

"He *is* serious," admitted Isabel, "but he is very kind. I daresay he wouldn't mind if I asked him nicely."

"It's quite possible," said Tony gravely. He glanced at his watch. "We ought to be getting along to the Empire," he added, "or we shall miss the performing sea lions. I wouldn't have that happen for anything in the world."

He paid the bill, and leaving the restaurant they strolled off through the brightly lighted streets in the direction of Leicester Square. It was a delightfully fine evening, and Isabel, who had insisted on walking, drank in the varied scene with an interest and enjoyment that would have satisfied Charles Lamb. There was a freshness and excitement about her pleasure in it all that spoke eloquently of the dull life she must have been forced to lead by her guardian, and Tony felt more gratified than ever at his remembrance of the heavy thud with which that gentleman had rebounded from the sun-baked soil of Richmond Park.

It cannot justly be said that the Empire programme contained any very refreshing novelties, but Isabel's enthusiasm was contagious. Tony found himself applauding the sea lions and the latest half naked dancer with generous if indiscriminating heartiness, while the jests of a certain comedian took on a delicate freshness that they had not known since the earliest years of the century.

It was not until the orchestra had completed their somewhat hasty rendering of *God Save the King*, that Isabel, with a little sigh of satisfaction, expressed herself ready to depart. They strolled down together to the R.A.C. Garage where Tony had left the car, and in a few minutes they were picking their way through the still crowded streets of the West End in the direction of Hampstead.

From Tottenham Court Road they had a beautiful clear run home, the Hispano sweeping up Haverstock Hill with that effortless rhythm that only a perfectly tuned-up car can achieve. They rounded the quiet deserted corner of Latimer Lane, and gliding gently along in the shadow of the trees, pulled up noiselessly outside Mrs. Spalding's house.

"Hullo," said Tony. "Somebody else has been dissipating too."

He pointed up the road to where about thirty yards ahead, the tail-light of another car could be seen outside one of the houses.

Isabel laughed with a kind of soft happiness. "I hope they have had as nice an evening as we have," she observed generously.

Pulling her skirt round her, she stepped lightly out of the car, and having switched off the engine, Tony followed suit.

"I will just come in and see that everything's right," he said. "I told Bugg that we should be back about eleven-thirty."

He moved towards the gate which was in deep shadow and laid his hand upon the latch. As he did so there was the faintest possible rustle in the darkness beside him. With amazing swiftness he wheeled round in the direction of the sound, but even so he was just too late. A savage blow in the mouth sent him staggering back against the gate-post and then before he could recover a figure leapt out on him with the swiftness of a panther, and clutched him viciously around the body. At the same instant a second man sprang out from the gloom, and snatched up Isabel in his arms.

Half dazed as he was by the blow, Tony struggled fiercely with his unknown assailant. Swaying and straining they crashed backwards together into the garden gate, and the suffocating grip round his waist momentarily slackened.

"Bugg!" he roared at the top of his voice. "Bugg! !" In the darkness a hand seized him by the throat, but with a tremendous effort he managed to shake it off, and jerking his head forward brought the top of his forehead in violent contact with the bridge of his assailant's nose. A yelp of agony went up into the night, and at the same instant a

swift patter of footsteps could be heard hurrying down the garden path.

Either this sound or else the pain of the blow seemed to have a disturbing effect upon the stranger, for once again his grip loosened and with a final effort Tony tore himself free. He was panting for breath, and the blood was trickling from his cut lips, but his only thought was for Isabel's safety. Thirty yards away in the gleam of his own headlights he could see a furious scuffle taking place outside the other car. With a shout of encouragement he hurled himself to the rescue, and even as he did so the quick sharp sound of a pistol rang out like the crack of a whip. The struggling mass broke up into two figures—one of which reeled against the car with his hands to its head, while the other—Isabel herself—staggered back feebly in the opposite direction. Tony flung his last available ounce of energy into a supreme effort, but the distance was too great to cover in the time. Just as he reached the spot there came the grinding clang of a clutch being hastily thrust in, and the car jerked off up the road with the door swinging loose upon its hinges.

For a moment both he and Isabel were too exhausted to speak. Panting and trembling she clung to his shoulder, the little smoking pistol still clutched tightly in her hand.

Tony was the first to recover his breath.

"Well done, Isabel," he gasped.

She looked up at him, her breast rising and falling

quickly, and her brown eyes full of a sort of passionate concern.

"Oh, Tony," she said, "you're hurt. Your face is all covered with blood."

Tony pulled out his handkerchief and dabbed it against his lips. "It's nothing," he said cheerfully, "nothing at all. I bleed very easily if any one hits me in the mouth. All really well bred people do." He bent down and took the little pistol out of her hand. "Who was the gentleman you shot?" he asked.

Isabel shook her head. "I don't know. I have never seen him before. He was a rough, common man with a red face."

"He ought to die all right anyhow," said Tony hopefully. "It was nothing like the ten yards, and Harrod is very reliable as a rule."

"I'm afraid he won't," said Isabel in a rather depressed voice. "I aimed at his head, but he ducked and I think I only shot his ear off."

"Well, we won't bother to look for it," said Tony. "I don't suppose it was a particularly nice one." He turned and glanced down the road. "Hullo," he added, "here comes Bugg! I wonder what he's done with the other chap."

With an anxious expression upon his face, the faithful "Tiger" was hurrying along the pavement towards them, moving with that swift cat-like tread that stamps the well-trained athlete. He pulled up with a sigh of relief on seeing that they were both apparently safe.

"Sorry I was so long comin', Sir Ant'ny," he observed. "I didn't 'ear nothin'—not till you shouts 'Bugg.'"

"I didn't notice any appreciable delay," replied Tony kindly. "Who was our little friend at the gate?"

Bugg's face hardened into the somewhat grim expression it generally wore in the ring. "It was that swine Lopez—beggin' your pardon, miss. But it was 'im all right, sir: there ain't no error abaht that."

Tony's damaged lips framed themselves into a low whistle. "Lopez, was it!" he said softly. "I ought to have guessed. There was a touch of the expert about that punch."

"'E ain't 'urt yer, 'as 'e, sir?" demanded Bugg anxiously.

"Oh, no," said Tony, "but he had a very praiseworthy try."

Bugg chuckled. "You done it on 'im proper, sir. I seed 'is face w'en 'e come aht in the lamp-light, and 'e didn't look as if 'e wanted no more. Any'ow 'e wasn't exac'ly waitin' for it."

"Bolted, I suppose?" said Tony laconically.

Bugg nodded. "Run like a stag, sir. I didn't go after 'im, not far: I reckoned you might be wantin' me 'ere."

"Well, we'd better be getting into the house," said Tony. "We shall have some of the neighbours out in a minute. They are not used to these little scuffles in Hampstead."

Even as he spoke one of the front gates clicked,

and an elderly gentleman in carpet slippers and a purple dressing-gown appeared on the pavement. He was clutching a poker in his right hand, and he seemed to be in a state of considerable agitation.

On seeing the small group he came to an abrupt halt, and drew back his weapon ready for instant action.

"What has happened?" he demanded shrilly. "I insist upon knowing what has happened."

With a disarming smile Tony advanced towards him.

"How do you do?" he said pleasantly. "I am Sir Antony Conway of Goodman's Rest."

The elderly gentleman's harassed face changed at once to that affable expression which all respectable Englishmen assume in the presence of rank and wealth.

"Indeed—indeed, sir," he observed. "I am delighted to meet you. Perhaps you can inform me what has occurred. I was aroused from my sleep by the sound of firearms—firearms in Hampstead—sir!"

"I know," said Tony; "it's disgraceful, isn't it—considering the rates we have to pay?" He made a gesture towards the car. "I am afraid I can't tell you very much. I was driving my cousin back from the theatre, and when we pulled up we ran right into what looked like a Corsican vendetta. I tried to interfere, and somebody hit me in the mouth for my pains. Then I think they must have heard you coming, because they all cleared out quite suddenly."

The elderly gentleman drew himself up into an almost truculent attitude.

"It is fortunate that I was awakened in time," he said. "Had I been a sound sleeper—" He paused as though words were inadequate to convey the catastrophe that might have ensued. "All the same," he added with true British indignation, "it's perfectly scandalous that such things should be allowed to take place in a respectable neighbourhood like this. I shall certainly complain to the police the first thing in the morning."

"Yes, do," said Tony, "only look here, I mustn't keep you standing about any longer or you will be catching cold. That would be a poor return for saving my life, wouldn't it?"

He wrung the old gentleman's hand warmly, and the latter, who by this time had apparently begun to believe that he had really achieved some desperate feat of heroism, strutted back up his garden path with the poker swinging fiercely in his hand.

Tony turned to the others. "Come along," he said. "Let's get in before any more of our rescuers arrive."

Bugg had left the front door of Mrs. Spalding's house open, and they made their way straight into the little sitting-room, where the gas was burning cheerfully, and a tray of whisky and soda had been set out on the table.

Tony inspected the latter with an approving eye.

"You are picking up the English language very quickly, Isabel," he remarked.

She smiled happily. "I asked Mrs. Spalding to get it for me," she said. "I know that men like to drink at funny times—at least all father's friends used to." She pulled up an easy-chair to the table. "Now you have got to sit down and help yourself," she added. "I am going to get some warm water and bathe your mouth. It's dreadfully cut."

Tony started to protest, but she had already left the room, and by the time he had mixed and despatched a very welcome peg, she was back again with a small steaming basin and some soft handkerchiefs.

He again attempted to raise some objection, but with a pretty imperiousness she insisted on his lying back in the chair. Then bending over him she tenderly bathed and dried his cut lips, performing the operation with the gentleness and skill of a properly trained nurse.

"Perhaps you're right after all about the Royal blood," he said, sitting up and inspecting himself carefully in a hand-glass. "I doubt if any genuine queen could have so many useful accomplishments."

"I have never been allowed to do anything for anybody yet," said Isabel contentedly. "I have got a lot of lost time to make up."

Tony took her hands, which she now surrendered to him without any trace of the slight embarrassment that had formerly marked their relationship.

"You are only just beginning life, Isabel," he said. "You have all the advantage of being born suddenly at eighteen. It's much the nicest arrangement, really, because no intelligent person ever enjoys their

childhood or schooldays." He released her hands, and glanced across at the clock on the mantelpiece. "It's time you went to bed," he added. "We'll talk about our adventure in the morning. One should always have a good night's rest after shooting off anybody's ear. It steadies the nerves."

"All right," said Isabel obediently. "I don't suppose they will try again to-night, do you?"

Tony shook his head. "No," he replied; "otherwise I would stay here and sleep on the mat." He took up his hat off the table. "Try and get packed by eleven if you can manage it. I will come round and call for you with the Peugeot: your things will just go nicely into the back." He paused. "Good-night, Isabel, dear."

She looked up at him with that frank, trustful smile of hers.

"Good-night, Tony, dear," she said.

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It was exactly a quarter to one the next day, when the second curate at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, whose mind was full of a sermon that he was composing, stepped carelessly off the pavement into the roadway. This rash act very nearly ended any chances of his becoming a bishop, for a large travel-stained car that was coming along Holbein Place at a considerable speed, only just swerved out of his path by the fraction of an inch. With an exclamation that sounded extraordinarily like "dammit" the curate leaped

back on to the pavement, and turning down Chester Square, the car pulled up in front of Lady Jocelyn's.

Tony and Isabel stepped out, and with a certain air of satisfaction the former glanced round the comparatively deserted landscape.

"I think we have baffled them, Isabel," he said, "unless that curate was a spy."

Isabel laughed. "He was very nearly a corpse," she remarked.

The door of the house opened, emitting two of Lady Jocelyn's trim maids, who were evidently expecting their arrival. Tony assisted them to collect the luggage and carry it into the house, and then following one of them upstairs, he and Isabel were ushered into the drawing-room, where Lady Jocelyn was waiting to receive them.

"This is Isabel, Aunt Fanny," he said.

Lady Jocelyn took in the rightful Queen of Livadia with one of her shrewd, kindly glances.

"My dear," she said, "you are very pretty. Come and sit down."

Isabel, smiling happily, seated herself on the sofa beside her hostess, while Tony established himself on the hearth-rug in front of the fireplace.

"She is an improved edition of Molly Monk," he observed contentedly; "and Molly is supposed to be one of the prettiest girls in London."

"You ought to be nice-looking," said Lady Jocelyn, patting Isabel's hand. "Your father was a splendidly handsome man before he took to drink. I remember the portraits of him they used to stick up

in Portriga, whenever Pedro's father was more than usually unpopular." She turned to Tony. "I am thankful that you have got her here safely," she added. "I stayed awake quite a long time last night wondering if you were having your throats cut."

Tony laughed. "No," he said; "it was only my lip, and Isabel patched it up very nicely."

Lady Jocelyn put on her tortoise-shell spectacles, and inspected him gently.

"My dear Tony," she said, "now I come to look at you I can see that you are a little out of drawing. I was so interested in Isabel I never noticed it before."

"It's only temporary," said Tony. "My beauty will return." He glanced at the clock, and then pulled up an easy-chair. "I will tell you the whole story if you like, Aunt Fanny. There is just time before lunch, and it always gives me an appetite to talk about myself."

Lady Jocelyn nodded. "Go on, Tony," she said, encouragingly. "We have plenty of food in the house."

There is something rather effective about a really incongruous atmosphere, and described the next morning, with the solid respectability of Chester Square as a background, the midnight battle of Latimer Lane seemed to gain rather than lose in vividness. Tony told it with what for him was a really praiseworthy restraint and directness, and he had just got to the end when the door opened and the parlour-maid announced that lunch was ready.

Lady Jocelyn rose from the sofa. "Let us go and have something to eat," she said. "I feel absolutely in need of support. Your society has always been stimulating, Tony; but since you have adopted a profession I find it almost overwhelming."

She put her arm through Isabel's, and they made their way down to the dining-room where a dainty little lunch was waiting their attention. For a few minutes the conversation took a briskly gastronomic trend, and then, having dismissed the parlour-maid Lady Jocelyn turned to Tony.

"You can go on," she said. "I feel stronger now."

"I don't know that there's very much more to tell," said Tony. "I had to explain it all to Guy who was very hard and unsympathetic. He said it served me right for taking Isabel to the Empire, and that it was only through the mercy of Heaven we were both not wanted for murder. I think he must have meant Harrod, but he said Heaven."

"They are not at all alive," replied Lady Jocelyn, "at least I hope not. I should hate to spend eternity in Harrod's." She paused. "I wonder if there is any chance of your having been followed this morning?"

"I don't think so," said Tony. "They probably watched us start, but I took a little tour round Barnet and Hertford before coming here. We didn't see any one following us—did we, Isabel?"

Isabel shook her head. "I don't think Da Freitas would try," she said, "not if he has seen you drive. He never wastes his time upon impossibilities."

Lady Jocelyn laughed. "My dear," she said gently; "you mustn't make jokes if you want to be taken for a genuine queen. Joking went out of fashion with Charles the Second. Nowadays no Royalty has any sense of humour; indeed in Germany it's regarded as a legal bar to the throne." She turned back to Tony. "Have you heard from your captain yet?"

Tony nodded. "I had a wire this morning. He says the *Betty* can be ready for sea any time after Thursday."

"That's the best of being a ship," observed Lady Jocelyn a little enviously. "One has only to paint oneself and take in some food and one's ready to go anywhere. I have to buy clothes, and make my will, and invent some story that will satisfy my brother-in-law the Dean. I promised to go and stay with him next month: and it will have to be a good story, because Deans are rather clever at that sort of thing themselves."

"I think it's so kind of you to come with us," observed Isabel simply.

"My dear," said Lady Jocelyn, "I couldn't possibly allow you to go away alone on the *Betty* with Tony and Guy. It would be so bad for the morals of the captain." She pressed the electric bell. "By the way, Tony—is Guy coming, and have you decided yet where you are going to take us?"

"Guy's coming all right," replied Tony. "He has gone to the Stores this morning to look through

their patent life-saving waistcoats." He helped himself to a glass of Hock. "I thought we might try Buenos Ayres, Aunt Fanny. It's just the right time of year."

"I have no objection," said Lady Jocelyn. "I don't know much about it except that you pronounce it wrong, Tony."

"It's quite a nice place, I believe," said Tony. "They buy all our best race-horses."

There was a brief interval while the parlour-maid, who had just come in, cleared away their plates, and presented them with a fresh course.

"I haven't a great number of race-horses to dispose of," observed Lady Jocelyn, when the girl had again withdrawn, "but all the same I shall be very pleased to go to Buenos Ayres. When do you propose to start?"

"Whenever you like," said Tony generously.

Lady Jocelyn reflected for a moment. "I think I could be ready by to-day week. We oughtn't to be longer than we can help or Da Freitas may find out where you have hidden Isabel."

"To-day week it shall be," said Tony. "I will send Simmons a wire to have everything ready, and then we can all motor down in the Rolls and start straight away."

"And in the meantime," observed Lady Jocelyn, "I think it would be wiser if you didn't come here at all, Tony. They are sure to keep a pretty close eye on you, and you might be followed in spite of all your precautions. I am not nervous, but we don't want

to have Isabel shooting people on the doorstep. It would upset the maids so."

"I expect you're right, Aunt Fanny," said Tony a little sadly, "but it will be very unpleasant. I have got used to Isabel now, and I hate changing my habits."

"It will be quite good for you," returned Lady Jocelyn firmly. "You are so accustomed to having everything you want in life it must become positively monotonous." She turned to Isabel. "You can always talk to Tony on the telephone, you know, when you get bored with an old woman's society."

Isabel smiled. "I don't think I shall wait for that," she said, "or we might never talk at all."

CHAPTER XV

IMPENDING EVENTS

"THERE'S a letter for you," said Guy, "from Livadia."

Tony walked to his place at the breakfast table and picked up the missive in question which was propped against the *Times* beside his plate.

"It's from Jimmy," he observed tranquilly. "How exciting!"

He opened the envelope and took out the contents—a large sheet of thin paper covered on both sides with a small neat handwriting. Sitting down in his chair he spread it out in front of him.

GARAGE ANGLAIS,
PRAÇA D. PORTO.
Portriga.

MY DEAR TONY:

It was very nice and unexpected of you to answer my letter—especially within three months of your having received it. You must be getting quite energetic in your old age, or is it only due to the influence of "the young and beautiful friend who takes a morbid interest in Livadian politics?" Anyhow, it's comforting to know that you're still alive, and that you still have young and

beautiful friends. I was half afraid that I was the last of them.

Now with regard to your questions. The only thing that seems pretty certain about the future here is that there's going to be a Hell of a dust up before long. It's an open secret that the Royalists are plotting all over the place, and that they've got a good part of the officers in the army with them. Down in the south, however, there seems to be a strong party that's in favour of the other branch—the descendants of that drunken scoundrel Don Francisco—whoever they happen to be. Personally I can't say I take much interest in any of them. Apart from my garage, I think the best thing for Europe would be if the whole damn lot cut each other's throats. I except the old President, who is not half a bad sort—and has a very pretty taste in cigars and champagne. He is all right, however, because I know he has a good parcel tucked away somewhere, and means to do a bunk directly things get too hot. If I were you I should tell your young and beautiful friend to give up taking an interest in Livadian politics and start keeping rattle-snakes. It's a much more healthy and profitable hobby.

I have had one stroke of luck. I have managed to palm off my business here on a local syndicate for a couple of thou., and am now employed as Managing Director at £500 a year and commission. "Commission" in Portriga means whatever you can cheat out of the customers or steal from your employers. So far I am doing nicely at both, thank you, but I don't expect it will last long. Another revolution of course would bust us up altogether, because the first thing that would happen would be that both sides would come down and snaffle our cars. So I am just making an honest living while the sun shines, and leaving the rest to Prov.

You are three sorts of a brick to think out that job in Piccadilly, but as it stands it's rather too one-sided an arrangement. I couldn't take it unless I was in a position to shove in a little of my own money too. Practically all I've got at present would have to go to my dear creditors, who have been so patient and long-suffering—I don't think!—God bless 'em. If you will keep it open for say, another year—by which time I ought to have swindled the Garage Anglais out of quite a decent sum—I shall be only too delighted to come back and wipe the floor with you at billiards as often as you like. Your notion that you can beat me is one of the most pathetic instances of monomania I ever came across.

Remember me to Guy, who I suppose is as frivolous as ever, and give my love to any of the old crowd who are still knocking around.

Yours ever,

JIMMY.

Given from our place of hiding this third day of the fifth month in the second year of our exile.

Tony read this letter through and then tossed it across to Guy, who perused it in turn between mouthfuls of egg and bacon.

'His troubles don't seem to have sobered him down at all,' he observed rather disapprovingly.

"I hope not," said Tony. "A sobered down Jimmy would be a lamentable object—something like an archangel with his wings clipped."

"What he says is true enough, I suppose," pursued Guy. "At least it only confirms what Congosta told us."

Tony nodded. "Things are on the move all right," he remarked complacently. "I am pretty sure Da Freitas meant to press the button just as soon as the wedding was over. He must be tearing his back hair over this hitch in the programme."

"I am glad we have got Isabel away from the Spaldings," observed Guy, handing back the letter, "I shan't feel really easy in my mind though, until she is on board the *Betty*."

"Well, it won't be long now," said Tony, "and anyway she is pretty safe at Chester Square. Aunt Fanny is keeping her tight to the house, and so far they haven't seen a sign of any one hanging about. I really think we handed 'em the dummy all right, though it doesn't do to be too sure about things with a gentleman like Da Freitas."

"I wish we had some idea what he was up to," said Guy. "There is something very trying about this uncertainty."

"I have hopes of Molly," replied Tony, pouring himself out a second cup of tea in an absent-minded fashion. "She rang me up yesterday while I was out, and left a message that I was to come and see her this morning without fail." He took a meditative sip, and then set down the cup. "It's about time we heard something from Congosta too," he added.

Guy shrugged his shoulders. "I shouldn't put any faith in him. He is probably playing his own game just as much as Da Freitas is."

Tony looked at him sadly. "You get more cynical

every day, Guy. I believe in Congosta. No man could have such a beautiful faith in the British Aristocracy unless there was some good in him." He pushed back his chair and rose from the table. "I'm off to see Molly anyway," he added. "I've a feeling that she has something exciting to tell us, and a certain amount of excitement has become necessary to my system. I can't get my afternoon sleep without it."

"I wish you would try to be a little more serious," answered Guy in a fretful voice.

Tony paused at the door. "I do try," he said apologetically, "but it's very difficult for a beginner."

It was just a quarter past ten when Tony arrived outside Basil Mansions, the big block of flats where Molly lived. He caught sight of a clock as he pulled up the car, and it suddenly struck him that in spite of the urgency of Molly's message, it was still rather early to disturb her slumbers. He hesitated for a moment, and then decided to fill in a little time by motoring on to the R.A.C. and calling for his letters.

Amongst the several clubs to which he belonged the latter was the one at which he was accustomed to receive the largest number of communications. The majority of them were trade circulars from motor firms, and it was his custom to drop in at least twice a week and commit them to the hall porter's waste-paper basket.

Putting in his clutch he continued his journey,

and was just rounding the corner of Pall Mall, when he suddenly became aware of the immaculately dressed figure of his cousin Henry striding briskly along the pavement towards him in the direction of Whitehall. The encounter was too sudden to admit of any strategy, so with a graceful resignation to fate he brought the car to a halt.

Henry came up with a look of surprise upon his face.

"One doesn't often see you about as early as this," he observed.

"You will in future," said Tony. "I have turned over a new leaf. I find that all our successful statesmen have been early risers."

"I am pleased to hear it," said Henry heartily. "I always thought that if you ever took up politics it would make all the difference to you."

"It has," said Tony.

There was a short pause.

"Did you get that White Book about the Patagonia boundary dispute?" inquired his cousin.

Tony nodded. "I did," he said. "I haven't had time to read it all yet, but it seems most interesting. Such good print too."

"They get them up very well," said Henry. "I will send you round some more as soon as you have gone through that. There is nothing like a thorough grounding before you start work."

"I wish you would," replied Tony. "I was half thinking of running across to South America in the *Betty* with Guy, and looking into things myself for a

few weeks. I should like to have some nice interesting reading for the voyage."

Henry looked at him in surprised approval. "I think that's a very good idea," he said. "Laura will be extremely pleased when I tell her, because it shows that you are taking the matter seriously." He pulled out a little tablet from his waistcoat pocket and made a note in pencil. "I will see if I can get you a few letters of introduction to some of our people over there. I shall say of course that you are just taking a voyage for your health."

"That's about right," said Tony. "Thanks so much. I must be trotting now, or I shall be late for an appointment."

He waved a good-bye and started off the car again, while Henry, putting back his memorandum tablet, continued his way to the Home Office.

Half an hour later, having disposed of the motor circulars and having restored his energies with a brandy and soda, Tony set out again for Basil Mansions. It was still only eleven o'clock, but Claudine, who answered the bell, informed him that Molly was already up and awaiting his arrival in the drawing-room.

He found her as usual sitting at the piano, practising over a song. She spun round on the stool at his entrance, and then jumped up with both her hands outstretched.

"Oh, Tony," she exclaimed, "I am so glad you have come."

He waited until Claudine had closed the door,

and then kissed her carefully on the curve of her cheek.

"I should have been here long before, Molly," he said, "but I was afraid of waking you up. A good night's rest is so essential to brain-workers."

"I have been up ages," she replied. "I can never sleep when I am excited or worried—at least not after nine o'clock."

"What's worrying you?" he asked, settling himself on the sofa.

She sat down beside him. "It's Peter," she said. "He was here yesterday—yesterday afternoon. I rang you up directly he had gone."

"Well?" inquired Tony.

Molly took a deep breath. "He had come to say good-bye."

Tony sat up. "What?" he demanded.

Molly nodded her head. "He didn't admit it in so many words, but that's what it came to."

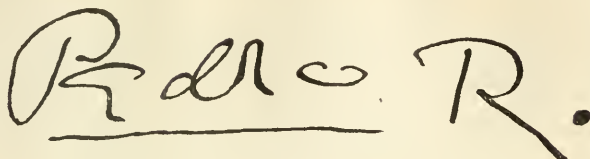
There was a short pause.

"He must have more nerve than I gave him credit for," said Tony slowly.

"Oh, I don't mean good-bye altogether," said Molly with a little laugh. "That isn't Peter's idea at all." She jumped up from the sofa, and crossing to the writing-table in the corner opened the drawer and took out something from inside. "Look at this," she said.

"This," was a half sheet of stiff note-paper stamped in gold with the Royal Livadian arms, and bearing two or three straggling lines of writing, at

the bottom of which sprawled a large irregular signature.



Tony examined it with interest. "It looks very impressive," he said. "What's it all about?"

"It's a sort of pass," said Molly calmly, "like one gets for a theatre, you know. It means 'do whatever the bearer wishes without asking any questions.'" She took it back from him and slipped it into the envelope which she was holding in her hand. "That would take me anywhere I pleased in Livadia if Peter was king."

"But what's the good of it now?" asked Tony. "Why has he given it you?"

Molly crossed to the writing-table, and putting the envelope back, shut the door and locked it.

"I will tell you exactly what happened," she said, coming back and re-seating herself on the sofa. "Peter rolled up here about five o'clock yesterday in a taxi—not in his car—just in an ordinary taxi. I guessed there was trouble because when he does that it always means that he doesn't want Da Freitas to find out where he's been. Well, I gave him a drink, and he sat and talked for a bit in his ordinary way, but all the time I could see that there was some-

thing at the back of his mind—something he didn't quite know how to say. At last he managed to get it out. He wanted to know if I would trust him. If he had to go away suddenly, or if anything happened which made it impossible for him to see me for a little while, would I still believe that I was the only person in the world he really cared about? I pretended to be very surprised and asked what he expected to happen, but he wouldn't admit that there was anything definite or certain. He talked vaguely about a king not being his own master, and that he never knew from day to day when a revolution mightn't break out in Livadia and that if it did his place would be at the head of his people. Of course coming from Peter it was all the silliest sort of poppycock, and any one who wasn't a born idiot could have seen that he was keeping something back. However, I let him think that I swallowed it all, and after a bit he lugged out this paper and explained what it was. He said that if by any chance he was called away to Livadia quite suddenly, the first thing he should do, as soon as it was possible, would be to send for me. He wanted me to promise that no matter what had happened I would come out right away. I saw that he was in dead earnest and frightfully excited about it, so of course I said I would, and that seemed to quiet him down. Anyhow, he didn't talk any more about it, but I'm as certain as I am that I'm sitting here that something's going to happen, Tony, and damn soon too. You see I know Peter so jolly well."

"It looks precious like it," agreed Tony thoughtfully. "I shouldn't wonder if Da Freitas had changed his plans. Perhaps the battle of Latimer Lane has shaken his nerve, and he means to cut out the Isabel part of the programme and go straight ahead."

"The battle of what?" demanded Molly.

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know about it," said Tony. "We have been having all sorts of quiet fun of our own up at Hampstead." He paused for a moment to light himself a cigarette. "There's Jimmy's letter too," he added; "only I think I had better begin by telling you about the battle. There's nothing like doing things in their proper order: it's the secret of all real success in life."

"Drive ahead," said Molly encouragingly.

Tony, who by this time was becoming quite an adept in the narrative, again described the spirited little scuffle outside Mrs. Spalding's house, and the subsequent transference of Isabel to the more peaceful atmosphere of Chester Square. He wound up with a brief account of how Lady Jocelyn had been fully taken into their confidence, and of how they had decided on an immediate trip to South America as the most promising solution to the problem.

"I suppose you're right," observed Molly after a meditative pause. "If she stops in London that pig Da Freitas will get hold of her sooner or later, but I'm awfully sorry you're going, Tony. There is no one else that I can even talk to about things."

"I shan't be away so very long," said Tony com-

fortingly; "and it's much the best thing for you as well as for us. Even if they go ahead with the revolution, Peter isn't likely to marry any one else at present. There would be all sorts of international ructions if he tried to get a wife from another country, and anyway I shouldn't think the throne of Livadia was a very dazzling prospect for a foreign princess. At least, not according to what Jimmy says."

"What *does* he say?" asked Molly. "Can I see the letter?"

Tony gave it her and, spreading it out on her knee she bent forward and read it through carefully, her nicely pencilled eyebrows drawn together in a thoughtful frown.

"It's some letter," she observed, when she had finished, "but I don't think it gets us much further, does it? I know the Livadians must be a set of prize chumps or they wouldn't want Peter to be their king." She folded up the sheet of paper and handed it back to him. "I should like to meet Jimmy some day. He sounds all right."

"He's a dear fellow," said Tony, putting back the letter in his pocket. "In a way I like him better than any one except myself." He got up from the sofa. "I shall come and see you again before we go, Molly," he added. "I don't think there is any chance of our sailing before next Tuesday. Aunt Fanny has got to invent a lie that will satisfy the Dean of Ballingford, and that can't be done in a hurry."

"Righto," replied Molly; "and let me know at once if anything happens, or if there's anything I

can do to help you. You know I don't care a rap about the theatre: I would chuck it like a shot if it was really necessary."

Tony took her hands. "You're the best sportsman in London, Molly," he said, "and it's a thousand pities you can't be Queen of Livadia. You'd make a Hell of a good job of it."

Molly laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "You bet I should," she said crisply. "One can't be six years in musical comedy without learning how to treat rotters."

CHAPTER XVI

AN ARTISTIC FORGERY

SPALDING drew back the curtains with that slightly sacerdotal gravity that distinguished all his professional actions, and then turned towards Tony.

"Mr. Oliver asked me to inform you, sir, that he will not be having breakfast with you. He has to leave the house early on business."

Tony arranged himself more comfortably amongst the pillows. "In that case, Spalding," he said, "I think I shall break my good resolutions, and have a cup of tea up here. I can't face the *Times* and a poached egg single-handed."

"Very good, sir," observed Spalding, and retiring deftly to the lower regions, he returned in a few minutes with a tray containing the desired refreshment, a couple of letters, and a copy of the *Sportsman*.

Tony took a sip of the tea, lighted himself a cigarette from the big silver box beside his bed, and then proceeded to investigate his correspondence.

The first letter was of a philanthropic character. It was from a gentleman named Douglas Gordon, apparently of Scottish extraction, offering to lend him

any sum from £1,000 to £50,000 on his note of hand alone. Laying it one side he picked up the other, which was addressed in a solid, straightforward handwriting that he recognized immediately as that of his skipper—Captain Simmons of the *Betty*. Having as yet had no communication from the yacht, except for a wire in reply to his, Tony opened it with some interest.

It ran as follows:

May 7th,
S. Y. *Betty*,
SOUTHAMPTON.

DEAR SIR ANTONY CONWAY:

On receipt of your telegram I sent off a reply informing you that we could be ready for sea any day after Thursday next. I trust this duly came to hand, and that it will not be inconvenient to you to wait until the date in question. Not expecting that you would be needing the *Betty* for some weeks I had given instructions for one or two small jobs to be done in the engine-room, and the same were in hand at the time of writing.

In connection with this something rather curious has happened, which I feel it my duty to bring to your notice. Two days ago a gentleman came on board and asked to see me. He informed me that his name was Hemmingway, and that he was a friend of yours. He presented one of your cards with instructions written across it, apparently in your handwriting, that he was to be allowed to look over the yacht.

I showed him round, but in the middle of this I was called away to speak with the harbour-master with reference to our moorings. While I was engaged he continued his inspection of the vessel, visiting the engine-

room, which at that time was unoccupied. One of the crew saw him go in, but knowing that I had been showing him over the ship, didn't attach any importance to the matter.

Later on, after he had gone ashore, Mr. McEwen discovered, almost by chance, that an attempt had apparently been made to tamper with the engines. Without going into details I may say that if they had been started as they were, the damage would probably have been bad enough to keep us in port for at least an extra week.

I have gone fully into the matter, and it seems impossible that any one else could have been responsible except this gentleman. I thought therefore you ought to hear about it.

I can only suppose that knowing nothing of marine engines he was under the impression that he was performing some sort of a practical joke. If so, and you will excuse my saying so, it seems to me to have been an uncommon stupid and dangerous one. I don't suppose he realizes what would have happened to him if Mr. McEwen or the second engineer had happened to catch him in the act. I fancy he wouldn't have wanted to be funny with any more engines—not this side of the grave.

Everything is now ready for sea, or will be by the date I gave you. The necessary stores are coming on board, and some extra cases have arrived from Harrod's and Fortnum and Mason's, which I suppose you have ordered yourself in London.

Hoping that you are keeping well, and with my respectful regards to yourself and Mr. Oliver,

I have the honour to remain,

Yours truly,

JOHN SIMMONS.

Tony laid down the letter on the bed, took a thoughtful pull or two at his cigarette, and then, reaching up, pressed the electric bell, which was answered almost immediately by Spalding.

"Has Mr. Oliver gone out yet?" he inquired.

"He left the house a minute or two ago, Sir Antony. I could perhaps overtake him if you wished it."

Tony shook his head. "You had better not try, Spalding," he said. "You might drop dead from heart disease, and that would be very inconvenient."

"Quite so, sir," assented Spalding gravely.

"You can turn on my bath instead," observed Tony. "I have to go to Southampton." He threw back the bed-clothes and prepared to get out. "You might tell Bugg and Jennings that I shall want to see them as soon as I am dressed," he added.

Gathering up the tray, Spalding departed on his errand, and in a surprisingly short time for him Tony had completed his toilet, and was descending the staircase. As he reached the hall the door at the back opened, and Bugg appeared on the threshold. He came forward in that noiseless fashion which had won him his famous soubriquet.

"Mornin', Sir Ant'ny. Mr. Spalding says as you wanted to see me."

"That's right, Bugg," said Tony. "Are you a good sailor?"

"I dunno, sir," observed "Tiger" simply. "I ain't never tried—'cept once at the Welsh 'Arp."

"I am told that it can be very rough there at times," said Tony. He paused, and looked thought-

fully at his devoted henchman. "How would you like to come to South America on the *Betty*?" he inquired.

Bugg's blue eyes lit up. "Not 'arf, sir."

"Do you know where it is?"

Bugg nodded. "Yes, sir. Where they gets the cocoanuts."

"That's right," said Tony. "Well, we are going next week, at least I hope so. Just four of us. Lady Jocelyn, Miss Francis, Mr. Oliver and myself. There's plenty of room on board for you. Bring a set of gloves, and we can have some sparring on the way over. It's just possible we might be able to fix up a match in Buenos Ayres and pay the expenses of the trip. I believe there are some very rash people there, and they seem to have plenty of money."

Bugg went off, beaming with satisfaction, and leaving the house, Tony made his way up to the garage, where he found Jennings surrounded by various portions of the Hispano's interior. It was an exceptional morning when Jennings did not partially dismantle one or other of his charges.

"It had better be the Rolls, sir," he observed gloomily, on learning that Tony desired to go to Southampton. "Both the others are pulling something sickening. D'you want me to come too, sir?"

"I think it would cheer me up," said Tony. "Besides, wouldn't you like to see the yacht?"

"Just as you please, sir," observed Jennings indifferently. "I don't take much stock in boats myself. The dry land's good enough for me."

Tony seated himself on the running-board of the Peugeot, which was also outside in the yard. "You have a happy and contented temperament, Jennings," he observed. "I often envy you."

Not receiving any reply to this compliment, he leaned back against the door of the car, and lighting another cigarette watched Jennings gathering up the fragments of the Hispano with that cold stoicism of one unjustly afflicted by the Fates. He had been enjoying this pleasant spectacle for several minutes, when a sudden sound of footsteps attracted his attention. A moment later Spalding emerged into sight round the corner of the bushes and advanced to where he was sitting.

"A gentleman has called, Sir Antony, and wishes to see you immediately. I told him that I would ascertain whether you were at home."

"That was very tactful of you, Spalding," said Tony. "Who is it?"

"Another foreign gentleman, sir. A Mr. Congosta."

Tony got up at once. "Oh, yes," he said, "I will see him certainly. Where is he?"

"Not knowing the gentleman, Sir Antony, I thought it best to leave him in the hall."

Tony nodded his approval. "We'll be off as soon as you are ready, Jennings," he said. "I may stay the night, so you had better bring your things with you."

Then, accompanied by Spalding, he made his way back down the drive, and re-entered the front door

outside which an empty taxi was ticking away with remorseless energy.

Señor Congosta, who was seated in one of the big leather chairs scattered about the hall, rose up at their entrance. He bowed to Tony, who at once came forward and greeted him with a hearty handshake, while Spalding withdrew discreetly through the door at the back.

"I have been expecting to see or hear from you," said Tony in his friendliest manner. "I have all sorts of interesting things to talk to you about."

Congosta cast a rapid glance round the hall, as if to make certain that they were alone.

"Her Royal Highness?" he demanded quickly. "She is safe?"

"Safe as a church," replied Tony. "At least she was when I rang her up last night."

"But she is not with you. She has gone from where she was living?"

"That's right," said Tony reassuringly. "Da Freitas found out the address, so I thought a change of air would be beneficial. She is staying with some friends of mine in Chester Square. They are taking excellent care of her."

A look of relief flashed into the Livadian's face.

"It is well," he said, nodding his head. "I knew that we might trust you."

Tony pulled up a chair. "Sit down," he said, "and let's hear your side of the story. I have been dying to know what's going on behind the scenes."

Congosta glanced swiftly at the clock on the man-

telpiece. "Many things have happened," he replied, "but there is not much time for telling them. In a few minutes I must leave you again."

"Well, one can tell quite a lot in a few minutes if one talks quickly," remarked Tony hopefully.

Congosta lowered his voice to a whisper. "The hour has struck," he said. "Even now, while we stand here, the streets of Portriga may be running in blood."

"By Jove!" said Tony with interest. "Whose blood?"

Congosta raised his hands in an expressive gesture. "There will be much fighting. All over Livadia men will die for one cause or the other. It will be the greatest civil war in the history of my unhappy country."

"That's saying something too, isn't it?" observed Tony. He paused to offer his guest a cigar. "How do you know all this?" he asked. "Have you heard from Colonel Saltero?"

"Every day I have news," replied Congosta a little proudly. "We have friends in many places—in the post-office, among the frontier guards, everywhere! It is easy to send a cable of which the government knows nothing."

"Well, what *has* happened—exactly?" demanded Tony.

Congosta took a long breath. "Da Freitas has given the signal. For three days his followers have been making ready. All through the North they have been arming themselves and collecting together

in the principal towns. It is the same with our people in the South."

"But how about the Republican government?" inquired Tony. "Haven't they anything to say to these happy gatherings?"

"They have said what they could," replied Congosta grimly. "Half a dozen of Da Freitas' agents have been seized and shot in Portriga, and yesterday they arrested General Carmel da Silva, our chief supporter and the richest man in Livadia. It was with his money that we were making our preparations."

"That's a nasty knock," said Tony sympathetically. "What are you going to do about it?"

"There is nothing to do," admitted Congosta with a fatalistic shrug. "Fortunately we have a fair supply of arms and ammunition—for the rest we must manage as best we can. In a few days there will be many rifles without owners in Livadia."

"And how about Pedro and Da Freitas?" demanded Tony. "Are they joining in the fun or are they going to sit tight at Richmond and see what happens?"

Again Congosta glanced at the clock. "It is because I want the answer to that question that I must leave you. Two days ago Da Freitas bought or hired Lord Northfield's steam yacht, the *Vivid*. She is lying off the Tower Bridge now, and so far as I know she is ready to sail at any moment. One of my men is watching her, but I dare not trust wholly anybody but myself. It is necessary that our people

should be informed the very moment that Da Freitas leaves England."

"Then you think he is going?" said Tony. "You think he has given up the idea of getting back the Princess?"

Congosta indulged in another shrug of the shoulders. "I cannot tell. It may be that the revolution has come against his will—that he is unable to control it longer. Even in that case I do not think he will easily give up his idea of the marriage. It is one thing to overthrow a government: it is another to take its place. It is only as the husband of Don Francisco's daughter that Southern Livadia could ever be persuaded to acknowledge Pedro." He paused. "You are quite sure that you were not followed when you took the Princess away?"

"I am never quite sure of anything," said Tony, "especially with people who purr and smile like Da Freitas does. All the same I think we managed to dodge them. I took her a twenty-mile run in the car first, and she has not been outside the house since she got to Chester Square."

"You have done well," observed Congosta with a kind of stately approval. "Should our hopes be fulfilled your name will be honoured for ever in Livadian history."

"That will be jolly," said Tony; and then, as Congosta gathered up his hat from the table, he added casually: "You will let me know at once, I suppose, if there should be any news. I may possibly be out of town to-night, but I shall be back in

good time to-morrow. My cousin, Guy Oliver, will be here in any case. You can speak to him as freely as you would to me."

Congosta nodded; and after shaking hands again warmly in the doorway, entered the taxi, which disappeared rapidly down the drive.

For a moment or two after his visitor had departed Tony remained wrapped in meditation. Then crossing the hall he pressed the electric bell for Spalding.

"I am going to Southampton as soon as Jennings is agreeable," he said. "You might put some pyjamas in a bag for me and shove them in the car."

Spalding departed on his errand, and walking thoughtfully to the telephone, Tony asked the girl at the Exchange for Lady Jocelyn's number. After waiting for several minutes, he was informed by a contemptuous voice that it was engaged, and hanging up the receiver he sat down at an old oak writing-table which filled up one of the bay windows. Then, selecting a piece of paper and a pencil, he wrote the following note to Guy.

MY DEAR GUY:

I wish you wouldn't get up at such ridiculous hours. It's a very unhealthy habit, and apart from that you brush all the dew off the lawn, and leave me without any one to ask advice from. I wanted your advice this morning badly.

In the first place when I woke up, I got the enclosed letter from Captain Simmons. I don't know how it strikes you, but it looks fishy to me—very fishy. I have never heard of any one called Hemmingway, and I have

no recollection of writing such instructions on one of my cards. Of course I might have done it when I was slightly intoxicated, but then I haven't been even slightly intoxicated for quite a long time. There are one or two pleasant fools among my friends, but no one I can think of who would be quite such an idiot as to try and break up the engines of the *Betty*.

The alternative is what you might call an ugly one—Da Freitas! It hardly seems possible, especially in view of my other news which I am going to tell you in a moment, and yet who the devil else could it be? If he has really dropped on to our notion of taking Isabel away, it's a serious business—so serious that I am going to motor down to Southampton straight away and find out all I can. Of course it isn't the least likely that Da Freitas would have shown up in the business himself, but I might get some useful information out of Simmons, and anyway I can at least make certain that everything will be all right for us on Thursday.

My other news comes from Congosta. In spite of all the bitter and unkind things you have said about him, he turned up here faithfully this morning to report progress. It was *some* report too. According to him the whole of Livadia by this time ought to be up to its ankles in gore. Things began to move two days ago, and although there has been nothing in the English papers yet, the odds are that the entire crowd of them—Royalists, Franciscans, and Republicans—are now pleasantly and usefully occupied in slitting each other's throats.

Of course I asked him at once about Pedro and Da Freitas. They haven't left England yet, but it seems that they have bought Lord Northfield's steam yacht, the *Vivid*—and a beauty she is too—and that she is lying in the Thames ready to push off at a moment's notice.

I admit that this doesn't look as if they could have had anything to do with the *Betty* affair, and yet it would be a devilish odd coincidence if any one else had tried such a trick. Besides, who on earth would try it? Everybody loves me—apart from Da Freitas and Jennings.

I have told Congosta as much as I thought was good for him. He knows that Isabel is now in Chester Square with some friends of mine, though I haven't given him the actual number. He seemed so pleased and contented I thought it was a pity to drag in anything about our South American idea in case he didn't approve of it. Also of course I haven't said a word to him about Molly. I mention this because if anything exciting happens while I am away, I have told him to roll up and inform you.

Jennings has just appeared outside with the car, and is scowling at me so horribly through the window that I can't write any more. You might, however, ring up Aunt Fanny and Isabel as soon as you come in and give them my love, and let them know what's happened. I tried to get on to them just now, but the girl at the telephone laughed me to scorn.

Your neglected and overworked cousin,

TONY.

Having fastened this up, with Captain Simmons' letter enclosed, Tony handed it to Spalding with instructions that he was to give it to Guy as soon as the latter came in. Then getting into his coat, he sauntered out through the porch and took his place at the wheel of the car, Jennings settling himself sombrely in the seat alongside.

The exact length of the journey from London to Southampton is stated by the *Motor Guide* to be

seventy-four and a half miles. This, however, must be due to an error of measurement on the part of the editor, since with an hour for lunch at Basingstoke, Tony covered the distance in three hours and fifty-two minutes, a feat which is clearly impossible in view of the present speed limit of twenty miles an hour.

He pulled up at that excellent hotel, the Victoria, where he engaged a couple of rooms for the night, and with the aid of a hot bath and a large whisky and soda, removed such portions of the roadway as had accumulated outside and inside his person. Then, leaving Jennings to perform a similar service to the car, he lighted a cigar and started off through the town in the direction of the Docks.

The *Betty* was lying out in the Roads, some little distance from the shore. With her graceful lines, her snowy white paint, and her gleaming brass-work, she presented as charming a picture as the eye of an owner could desire to gaze upon. Tony contemplated her with pride for a moment or two, and then availing himself of the services of one of the small cluster of ancient mariners, who had been hovering interrogatively round him, he set off in a dinghy, across the intervening stretch of water.

His advent was soon observed on board the yacht, and by the time he arrived alongside, Captain Simmons was standing at the head of the accommodation ladder waiting to receive him. The skipper, a short, square-shouldered, grey-bearded man with honest blue eyes, greeted his employer with a blend of pleasure and concern.

"Well, I *am* glad to see you, Sir Antony, but why ever didn't you let me know you were coming? I'd have had the gig ashore ready for you."

Tony shook hands warmly with him, and then turned to greet Mr. McEwen, the chief engineer, who came shambling up from below with a gleam of welcome showing through a forest of red whiskers.

"I don't like having the gig waiting for me," explained Tony. "It always makes me feel as if I was Sir Thomas Lipton."

They remained chatting for a moment or two, and then moved off across the deck, Tony stopping to exchange a word or two with various members of the crew, who all saluted him with the friendly grin of old acquaintance. It was not often that there was a new hand on board the *Betty*.

Captain Simmons led the way to his own cabin, where the time honoured ceremony of drinking a toast to the ensuing season having been duly discharged, he proceeded to add some further details to the brief report of his preparations that he had already sent along by post.

"I think you'll find everything nice and shipshape by Thursday, Sir Antony," he finished with a touch of self-pride. "Not knowing exactly where we were bound for I may have allowed a bit too much margin on the stores, but then I wasn't expecting those packages you sent from London."

"It's an error in the right dimension," observed Tony contentedly. "We are thinking of going to

Buenos Ayres to start with, and I always find the Atlantic very stimulating to one's appetite."

"Buenos Ayres!" repeated the skipper with interest. "And a very nice run too, sir." He turned to the chief engineer. "Just about twenty days out—eh, Mr. McEwen?"

The latter shifted his cigar to the corner of his mouth, and nodded gravely.

"Aye," he remarked; "though it might have been another tale if we hadna' found out the fule's work that veesitor friend o' yours was up to in the engine-room, Sir Antony."

"Ah!" said Tony: "that's one of the things I wanted to ask about. What sort of a person was he?"

There was a moment's pause.

"What sort of a person!" repeated the skipper. "Do you mean that you don't know him—that you didn't give him that card?"

"I have never heard of him in my life," said Tony tranquilly.

With a strange noise, such as a tiger would probably make if somebody trod upon his toe, Mr. McEwen turned to the skipper.

"Did I no tell ye that the mon was an impostor?" he demanded excitedly.

Fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, Captain Simons produced a dirty and crumpled visiting card, which he held out to Tony.

"It's only a chance that I didn't tear it up," he observed rather grimly.

Tony took the card which, despite its dilapidated appearance, had every appearance of being one of his own. He was just able to make out the following half obliterated message scribbled across it in pencil.

Mr. Hemmingway is a friend of mine.

Please allow him to look over the *Betty*.

A. C.

"I don't wonder it took you in," he said, with a tinge of admiration. "It's a most artistic forgery."

Mr. McEwen drew a deep breath. "My God!" he said softly; "I'm wishing I'd found him in the engine-room. I'd have broken him in twa."

"It's a pity you didn't," said Tony. "I should probably have been able to recognize one or other of the bits." He turned to Captain Simmons. "What was he like, and what did he do—exactly?"

The skipper, who was a man of slow speech, pondered for a moment before replying.

"He was right enough to look at in a way—well dressed and all that sort of thing. A youngish, darkish sort of fellow—might have had a touch of the Dago about him, but he spoke English as well as you or me. As for what he did—well, Mr. McEwen can tell you that best."

"I'd had the head off one o' the cylinders," burst out the Scotchman, "an' there she was put back in her place, but no screwed down. What did the black-hearted Jezebel do, but drop in a spanner, a nine-inch steel spanner that would ha' jarred the head

o' the cylinder to Gehenna if so be we'd screwed her doon wi'oot takin' a look inside."

"Have you any idea who he was, Sir Antony?" inquired the skipper anxiously.

"I think I know where he came from," replied Tony. He got up from his seat, and for a moment or two stared thoughtfully out of the skipper's port-hole.

It seemed evident beyond doubt that the mysterious "Mr. Hemmingway" could have been none other than an agent of Da Freitas, and for the first time since he had light-heartedly entered upon his adventure Tony felt a sudden slight sense of mis-giving. There was a touch about this latest effort of the Marquis that suggested unpleasant depths of knowledge and resource on that gentleman's part. It seemed hardly probable that he would have instigated an attempt upon the *Betty's* engines, unless he had a very shrewd idea of the use to which that vessel was shortly to be put. If this were so, the situation was some way from being as simple and safe as it had previously appeared, and with a sudden determination Tony resolved to take his companions into his confidence.

"I think you ought to know the facts of the case—both of you," he said. "It's quite on the cards I might be running you into trouble or even danger, and I don't think we included that in our agreements, did we?"

The skipper stroked his beard. "One can't include everything," he remarked; "eh, Mr. McEwen?"

"I'm no sayin' I've any great objection to eether,"

observed the latter cautiously; "not in good company."

"Well, you shall hear," said Tony; "and then you can judge for yourselves."

In as few words as possible he gave them a brief outline of the situation, starting from his original meeting with Isabel in Long Acre, and bringing the story down to Congosta's visit to Hampstead that morning. As a convincing narrative it gained rather than lost by this compression, for the mere facts, however crudely stated, had a dramatic grip about them that needed no embellishment or elaboration.

Both the skipper and Mr. McEwen listened to him with silent attention. It was a story which any one might have been pardoned for receiving with a certain amount of surprise or even incredulity, but neither of their faces showed any trace of their natural emotions. On the contrary they appeared to accept the entire narrative as though it were the sort of thing that might reasonably be expected to happen to any yacht owner of average experience.

It was Mr. McEwen who was the first to break the ensuing silence.

"I'm thinkin' that ye've done a guid act," he said gravely. "'Tis no business for a young lassie to be stuck up on a throne over a parcel o' murderin' Dagoes."

Captain Simmons nodded his assent. "You can rest your mind easy about the yacht, Sir Antony. There'll be no one else come on board—not till you arrive yourself."

"How about the crew?" suggested Tony. "Ought they to be told anything?"

"I'm inclined to think it would be injudeecious," put in Mr. McEwen. "Not that they would be makin' any deeficulties—they would gae to Hell to oblige you, Sir Antony—but mebbe 'twould gie 'em a sense o' their own importance that's no desirable in a crew. What do you say, Captain Simmons?"

Again the skipper nodded.

"Well, that all seems satisfactory enough," observed Tony cheerfully. "I am sure I am very much obliged to you both." He poured himself out another drink and lifted the glass. "Here's to the voyage," he said, "and may every owner have as sporting a lot of officers as I've got."

"Here's to the voyage, sir," said Captain Simmons, following his example, "and proud and glad to be of any assistance to you."

Very gravely Mr. McEwen reached for the whisky bottle. "Here's to the voyage, gentlemen," he repeated, "and God send that we meet the mon who put that spanner in my cylinder."

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It was close on eight o'clock by the time Tony returned to the hotel. He had some dinner in the big, sparsely populated restaurant, and then sending out a message by the waiter to Jennings, invited that sunny-souled mechanic to come up and play him a game of snooker in the billiard-room.

With the exception of backing losers, snooker was

Jennings' only human weakness, and on occasions when he and Tony were away together at a hotel he would so far relax his dignity as to oblige his employer in this unprofessional fashion. They played two games, both of which Jennings won—a circumstance which caused him so much satisfaction that he received Tony's instructions to have the car ready at eleven the next morning with what only just escaped being an amiable bow.

Despite the somewhat disquieting manner in which his suspicions about the attempt on the *Betty* had been confirmed, Tony managed to pass a very comfortable night. He dressed himself leisurely in the morning and strolled down to the dining-room about ten o'clock, where he instructed the waiter to bring him some China tea and a grilled sole.

A copy of the *Daily Mail* was lying on the table beside his plate, and in the casual fashion of one who is waiting for breakfast he opened it out in front of him at the centre page. As he did so a series of bold, heavily-leaded headlines leaped into view that brought an involuntary exclamation from his lips.

REVOLUTION IN LIVADIA

FIERCE FIGHTING AT PORTRIGA

REPORTED FLIGHT OF PRESIDENT

In a second the grilled sole and everything else had vanished out of his mind and he was eagerly scanning the following announcement.



"I will tell you the whole story if you like, Aunt Fanny. There is just time before lunch, and it always gives me an appetite to talk about myself."

Lady Jocelyn nodded. "Go on, Tony," she said encouragingly. "We have plenty of food in the house."

By a cable from Paris received shortly before going to press, we learn that yesterday evening a revolution broke out in Livadia, which appears already to have attained wide-spread proportions. So far, information is scanty, for the telegraph wires over the frontier have been cut, and the cable station at Portriga is in the hands of one or other of the belligerents.

It appears, however, that the revolt started simultaneously in the neighbourhood of Vanessa and also in the Capital. At both places the Royal Standard was raised by a strong party of King Pedro's adherents, and in both instances the Republican government seem to have been taken more or less by surprise. Vanessa is said to be entirely in the hands of the Royalists, who have also succeeded in occupying the greater part of Portriga.

The situation is complicated by another revolt in the South, where the partisans of the late Don Francisco, the Pretender, have also seized the opportunity to assert their claims. A strong force, under the leadership of General Almaida, is reported to be marching on the Capital, where the Republicans and the Royalists are still engaged in bitter and sanguinary street fighting. It is rumoured that the President has already left the country.

From inquiries at Richmond we learn that King Pedro and the Marquis da Freitas are still in England, but in response to numerous invitations they have so far declined to issue any statement to the Press.

All further details available will be found in the first edition of *The Evening News*.

Having read this interesting announcement through slowly and carefully, Tony laid down the paper and sat back in his chair.

So Congosta had been right! Underneath all the rather penny coloured plotting and cheap melodrama that had surrounded Isabel's story, a savagely real piece of European history had been silently coming to fruition. He had never doubted the fact himself, but somehow or other those flaming head-lines in the *Mail* suddenly brought it home to him with a vivid reality that had hitherto been wanting. It was as if the buttons had come off the foils, and what had hitherto been an entertaining fencing match had turned abruptly into a thrilling and dangerous duel.

With a pleasing sense of elation he drew up his chair, and prepared to face the grilled sole that the waiter was just bringing in.

"You might tell my chauffeur," he said, "that we will start back at half-past ten instead of eleven."

The waiter went out with the message, but a couple of minutes had hardly elapsed before he came back into the room bearing a telegram upon a small tray.

"If you please, sir," he said, "one of the sailors from your yacht has called with this. He is waiting in the hall in case you want him."

With a certain feeling of surprise Tony laid down his knife and fork, and slitting open the buff-coloured envelope, pulled out its contents.

They were brief and distinctly to the point.

Isabel has disappeared; fear the worst; come back immediately. GUY.

CHAPTER XVII

A DECOY MESSAGE

GUY must have heard the car turning in at the drive, for as they drew up in front of the house, he flung open the door and stepped out to meet them. He looked white and haggard in the bright morning sunshine.

"You got my wire?" was his first remark.

Tony, who was at the wheel, nodded his head, and climbed stiffly out of his seat. Hardened as he was to rapid driving, he felt something like a momentary reaction now that the return journey had been accomplished without disaster.

"Come into the house, Guy," he said. "You look like an advertisement for Sanatogen."

They entered the hall, where Tony took off his coat and threw it across the back of one of the chairs.

"Now," he said. "Tell me all about it."

"Da Freitas has got hold of Isabel," said Guy, making an effort to speak quietly. "She left Chester Square at nine o'clock this morning, and we have heard nothing of her since."

There was a brief pause.

"Go on," said Tony. "How did it happen?"

"It was my fault," answered Guy with a sort of harsh bitterness, "at least very largely it was. I spent practically all yesterday with Debenham trying to fix up about the Stanley estate. It was absolutely necessary to get the thing settled before we left England. Finally I went back to dinner at his house, and I didn't get home here till nearly one o'clock. Spalding had left your letter in my bedroom, but somehow or other—I was tired out and half asleep I suppose—I managed to overlook it, I had left instructions I wasn't to be waked up till nine o'clock this morning, and when Spalding came to call me, there was your letter on the dressing-table."

He paused.

"Directly I had read it I went down-stairs and rang up Chester Square. The housemaid answered the telephone, and said that Isabel had just left the house, and that Aunt Fanny was still in bed. When I asked if Isabel had mentioned any reason for going out so early, she said that Spalding had rung up a quarter of an hour before and said that you wanted Miss Francis to come over here in a taxi as soon as possible. Well, of course, I guessed there was something wrong at once. I sent for Spalding, and as I expected, he told me that he hadn't been near the telephone all the morning. I was getting really frightened now, so I told the girl to put me through to Aunt Fanny, who has got another receiver in her bedroom. Then it all came out. Somebody, who pretended to be Spalding, had rung up at about twenty to nine and asked for Isabel. He had said you wanted her here, and

that she was to take a taxi along as soon as she could manage it. Isabel evidently hadn't the faintest suspicion that it wasn't all right. Aunt Fanny was asleep at the time, and she wouldn't allow her to be waked up. She had just put on her hat and got into a taxi that was waiting a little way down the Square, and that's the very last that any of us have heard of her." Guy's voice shook, but with an effort he managed to control it. "They've got her, Tony," he added despairingly. "I would have given my right hand to have stopped it, but what's the good now? They've got her, and we shall never see her again."

Tony laid his hand on his cousin's shoulder. "My dear old Guy," he said quietly: "it wasn't your fault. If any one has been to blame, it's me." He took a couple of turns across the room and came back to where Guy was standing. "Hang it," he said ruefully. "I had no idea I was so fond of Isabel."

Guy looked up at him with a rather twisted smile. "I knew you would find it out eventually, Tony," he said. "It's a pity it's happened too late."

"Too late be damned," observed Tony calmly. "Even if Da Freitas has got hold of her, do you imagine I am going to let him keep her? I know now that I want Isabel more than anything else in the world. I have always been accustomed to have what I want, and it's a very bad thing to change one's habits suddenly at my age."

Guy made a kind of hopeless gesture with his hands. "But what can you do?" he demanded. "You have

seen the papers this morning—you know what's happening in Livadia? The odds are they will take her straight over there and marry her to Pedro right away."

"Then I shall go over and fetch her back," replied Tony firmly. "I am not going to allow any silly old-fashioned ideas about the sanctity of marriage to interfere with my life's happiness."

Guy opened his mouth to speak, but he was suddenly interrupted by the grinding scrunch of a second motor pulling up abruptly outside the house. Almost at the same moment the bell rang with a prolonged violence that echoed up from the basement.

"I rather think that must be Congosta," said Tony.

He crossed the hall, and pulling back the latch, opened the front door.

The visitor *was* Señor Congosta, but his most intimate friends might have been pardoned if for a moment they had failed to recognize him. Hatless, dishevelled, and with a long smear of blood at the corner of his mouth, he looked as if he had been taking part in a rather closely contested Irish election.

"So!" he observed, drawing himself up and glaring at Tony, "you have betrayed me."

Tony stepped towards him.

"Don't be silly," he said. "Come along in and sit down."

He thrust his arm through the Livadian's, and before the latter could protest he had brought him to a chair and practically pushed him into it. "You

had better have a drink right away," he added. "You look done to the world. Get the whisky, will you, Guy?"

Guy started off to do as he was asked, and before the disgruntled Señor had properly recovered himself Tony turned back to him with a disarming smile.

"Sorry to have been so snappy," he said. "I suppose you have just found out about Isabel, and of course you would think we were scoundrels—naturally."

With an effort Congosta managed to regain his power of speech.

"You know what has happened?" he demanded hoarsely. "You know where she is?"

"I have just heard that she was decoyed away from Chester Square by a false telephone message at nine o'clock this morning. For the moment I have no idea where she is. If I had I shouldn't be sitting here."

"Then you shall know!" gripping the arm of the chair, Congosta bent forward towards him. "She is a drugged and helpless prisoner on the *Vivid*. By now she is half-way down the Thames on her way to Livadia."

There was a second's pause, and then Guy reappeared from the dining-room with the whisky and soda.

"Do you hear that, Guy?" said Tony. "Señor Congosta says that Isabel is on board the *Vivid*, and that they have already started for Livadia."

Guy came up and put down the tray he was carrying.

"I knew it," he said hopelessly. "We shall never see her again—never."

"And whose fault is that?" demanded Congosta, striking the arm of the chair with his fist. "Did you not promise me that she should be safe? Did I not leave the honour of my country in your hands?"

"You did," said Tony, "and we have let you down with a bump."

He splashed some whisky and soda into a glass and held it out to the Livadian, who sat there glowering at them both with angry suspicion.

"Come, Señor," he added persuasively, "drink that up and you'll feel better. Whatever else we do, it's no good quarrelling amongst ourselves."

Congosta, who really did appear to be badly in need of it, gulped off a couple of mouthfuls of the stimulant, and set down the tumbler.

"Now listen to me," said Tony, speaking very slowly and quietly. "I admit that things look queer and I admit that you have every right to feel suspicious. But there has been no treachery. You can get that idea out of your head right away. I moved Isabel to Chester Square because I thought it was the safest place she could be in. We took every precaution, and I haven't the faintest motion how Da Freitas found out her address. It has been just as big a smack in the eye to us as it is to you."

Either the drink or else Tony's unwonted earnestness evidently brought some sort of conviction to the visitor. Once again his shattered faith in the British

aristocracy seemed slowly to revive, and rising to his feet, he bowed stiffly to his two companions.

"Gentlemen!" he said. "I spoke hastily. I ask your pardon."

"If there is any apologizing to be done," said Tony, "it's up to me. I have underrated Da Freitas all through in the most fatuous way—and this is the result!"

Congosta reseated himself.

"Please tell me exactly what happened this morning," he said.

"Somebody rang up the house in Chester Square and pretended to be my butler," answered Tony. "He said that I wanted Isabel to come here at once in a taxi. Unfortunately the lady she is staying with was still asleep, and instead of waking her up and asking her advice, Isabel seems to have gone straight outside and got into a taxi that was waiting in the Square. That's the last we have heard of her."

Congosta nodded. "I can give you the rest of the story," he said. "For three days I have rented a little room close to an empty warehouse opposite to where the *Vivid* was lying. There is a wharf just below where any one would start from if he wished to reach the vessel. Always there is someone in that room—I or another—watching and waiting. Last night, late and in the dark, a cart came down with luggage and packages. They took them on board, and I knew then that Da Freitas' plans were ready. Very early this morning they began to get up steam

on the yacht. I stayed there, watching from the window, and at ten o'clock a boat put off with four men in it. They were all Livadians—one I knew well by sight. I had seen him at Richmond with Da Freitas. When they got to the wharf, they came ashore and fastened up the boat. They were evidently expecting someone, because two of them took it in turns to watch, while the others went across the roadway to drink."

Congosta paused, and taking out his handkerchief pressed it against his lip.

"Just before midday," he went on, "a big closed car came quickly along the lane and pulled up at the wharf. There was no one about at the moment except the four sailors. I saw Pedro open the door and get out, and then almost before I could realize what was happening there was my Royal mistress, drugged, helpless, hardly able to stand—with the Count on one side of her and Da Freitas on the other."

He stopped again and took in a long breath.

"I think for a little while I was mad. It would have been better, far better, if I had not shown myself. Then I could have got away quickly and something might still have been arranged. But for the moment I was so full of rage and disappointment that I did not know what I was doing. I only remember running downstairs—my mind made up that I would kill Da Freitas. Then I was amongst them; and had it been any one else my knife would have been in his heart before they could have stopped

me. But I think that black, smiling devil cannot be surprised. Even as I flung myself at him, he dragged the Princess in front of him, and I could not strike for the fear that I might hurt her. Then in a moment I was beaten to the ground. I fought bravely—splendidly, but what could I do against six men? I must have been stunned by the blow on the head from behind, for I remember nothing more until I came to my senses again in the small wide shop across the street. Someone had found me lying on the wharf, and they had carried me in there thinking that I was dead.”

Once more he stopped, and reaching out a rather shaky hand for the tumbler finished off the whisky and soda.

“Are you badly hurt?” asked Guy, who had been listening to the narrative with a mixture of amazement and concern.

Congosta put his hand to his forehead. “It is nothing serious. Only my head aches very much. I think they would have killed me if it had not been for my hat.”

“Let’s have a look,” said Tony. “I know a little about cracked skulls.”

He came round to where Congosta was sitting, and bending over the latter’s chair, very carefully parted the hair at a place where it was matted with congealed blood.

“It’s a nasty bump,” he said sympathetically; “but I don’t think there is any real damage done. You must have a very good hatter.”

"Shall I fetch some hot water and bathe it for you?" suggested Guy, getting up from his seat.

Congosta raised his hand protestingly. "It will wait," he said with a certain grimness. "What we are speaking of will not."

Tony seated himself on the arm of the opposite chair. "Go on," he said. "What happened when you came round?"

"For a little while," continued Congosta, "I could remember nothing. Then suddenly it all came back to me, and somehow the shock seemed to make me strong again. The people in the wine shop wished to send for the police, but I would not let them. Instead I paid them to get me a taxi. I had made up my mind that first I would come to you, and that I would find out the truth. I could see from the window that the yacht had already moved from her moorings, and I knew that it was now too late for anything except to warn my friends in Livadia. That—and to be revenged upon you, if you had betrayed me."

There was a pause.

"It's horrible to be so helpless," said Guy with a sort of groan. "Is there nothing that we can do? I suppose there would be no chance of getting them held up for an hour or two at Southend?"

"What for?" asked Tony languidly.

"There's—there's this assault upon Señor Congosta."

The latter shook his head. "It would be useless," he said. "I know well that your government will be

only too pleased that they have gone. The police would not be allowed to interfere even if they wished to."

"But we must do something," exclaimed Guy almost fiercely.

Tony got up from his seat. "I know what I'm going to do," he said. "I am going to follow them to Livadia."

For an instant both of them stared at him without speaking.

"But how do you expect to get there?" demanded Congosta incredulously. "The steamers from England are stopped, and all the frontier is in the hands of Da Freitas' soldiers. No one will be allowed to enter the country until the Revolution is over."

"That doesn't matter to me," said Tony. "I have a private yacht of my own."

The news seemed to produce a remarkable effect upon Congosta.

"A private yacht!" he repeated, rising abruptly to his feet. "And you mean what you say? You mean that you will sail for Portriga now—immediately—at once?"

"Well, say to-morrow morning," suggested Tony. "That will give us time to get on board first."

By now all Congosta's headache and exhaustion seemed magically to have vanished.

"My friend!" he ejaculated fervently, "my dear Sir Antony! You may yet be of the truest service to my unhappy country."

"But look here!" broke in Guy, who had also

risen from his chair and was gazing from one to the other of them. "This is all very well, but what on earth's the use of it? Even if we got to Portriga you don't suppose we should have the faintest chance of being able to do anything!"

"I don't like looking too far ahead," said Tony. "It shows a lack of trust in Providence."

Congosta wheeled round excitedly to Guy. "Señor!" he exclaimed. "I assure you that you may yet save Livadia." He turned back to Tony. "You have seen this morning's paper? You know the truth about what has happened?"

"I have seen the *Daily Mail*," said Tony guardedly.

"So! That is right, what they have written, but there is later news." He thrust his hand into his breast pocket, and dragging out some papers, selected a crumpled cable form, which he opened with shaking fingers. "Even now General Almaida is in Portriga. He holds the whole town south of the river."

"Do you mean that you're in communication with them?" demanded Guy. "I thought all the wires had been cut."

"We were not without our preparations," returned Congosta with a vindictive smile. "The way is still open. It will not be closed so long as General Almaida is undefeated."

"And how long is that likely to be?" asked Tony.

Congosta drew himself up.

"Señor!" he replied dramatically. "It rests with you."

There was a short pause.

"Well?" said Tony encouragingly.

"There are two things in which our brave army is lacking—ammunition and money. If we can help them with these——"

Tony nodded. "What's the idea—exactly?" he asked.

Congosta took a step forward, his dark eyes gleaming with excitement. He began to speak in a low, rapid voice.

"A week ago, by the instructions of General Almada, I gave an order to one of your English houses for a supply of cartridges. The money was to have been sent to me, and we had arranged a plan for getting them safely across. Had the revolution not broken out they would now be on their way. As it is—!" he made a quick expressive gesture with his hands—"The money has not come, and even if I could pay there is no vessel that could take them to Livadia."

He paused for breath.

"We haven't a cargo license for the *Betty*," said Tony, "but I don't know that it really matters."

Congosta came nearer still. "You will do it," he gasped. "You will lend us this money? You will take the cartridges on your yacht?"

Tony nodded again. "Why of course," he said. "It's the least I can do after losing Isabel in that careless fashion."

With an exclamation of joy Congosta seized hold of his hand, and commenced wringing it violently up and down.

"My friend," he exclaimed with tears in his eyes. "How can I ever thank you?"

"But Good Heavens!" interrupted Guy, drawing in his breath. "Do you realize what this means? It's—it's—filibustering—piracy—buccaneering——"

"Is it?" said Tony—"what fun! I have always wanted to be a buccaneer ever since I was thirteen." He disentangled himself with some difficulty from the clutches of Congosta. "Don't worry, Guy," he added, "you needn't be mixed up with it in any way."

"What!" For a moment Guy's indignation rendered him almost speechless. "Do you suppose I am thinking of myself? Do you imagine I shall desert you—now—at this time?"

"There is not the danger that the Señor fancies," broke in Congosta with a kind of feverish eagerness. "Listen! I will explain!" He turned to Tony. "You have heard of Braxa?"

"I don't think so," said Tony regretfully. "You see I was educated at Eton."

"It is a fishing village—a small fishing village and harbour twenty miles south of Portriga. The people there are different from most of my countrymen. They are all fishermen, and they do not concern themselves much with politics."

"It sounds just the sort of quiet and sensible place one would like to visit," observed Tony.

"So! You understand what I mean!" Congosta's excitement became almost painful to witness. "You are on a voyage of pleasure! You come into the

harbour in your yacht. My people will be expecting you. In an hour the cartridges will be on shore, and then—" he paused and the same vindictive smile gathered in his eyes, "there may yet be a little hitch in the clever plans of the Marquis da Freitas."

"It's a great idea," said Tony admiringly. "So simple and safe! Why we needn't even land if we don't want to."

"But what would be the good?" began Guy.

He got no further, for he suddenly caught sight of his cousin's face, as the latter looked round at him, and its expression dried up the question that he was about to utter.

"These cartridges," inquired Tony, turning back to Congosta with his previously serene air. "How long do you think it would take to get them to Southampton?"

"There need be no delay," replied the Livadian. "It is only a question of the money. As soon as they are paid for I can arrange for them to be sent down on motor lorry. They would go to-night."

Tony nodded approvingly. "And how about your message to Livadia? It won't be an easy thing to explain. None of your people have ever heard of me except Colonel Saltero, and I don't think I impressed him very favourably."

Congosta dismissed the objection with a wave of his hand.

"You may leave that to me," he said. "I assure you that before he left England Colonel Saltero was convinced of your good faith. I shall arrange that

it is he who will meet you at Braxa to receive the cartridges."

"But won't you be coming with us?" asked Guy.

Congosta shook his head. "I must stay in London," he answered regretfully. "It is General Almaida's wish. Should our party win it is necessary that there should be someone here to obtain recognition from your government."

"Quite so," said Tony; "quite so." He lighted himself a cigarette, and took a couple of thoughtful paces up and down the hall. Guy did not speak again, but watched him with a strained apprehension that showed itself visibly in his face.

"Tell me," said Tony, coming back to where Congosta was standing. "Could you get a message through to any one in Portriga?"

Congosta looked faintly surprised. "I cannot say. It is possible. It would depend perhaps upon what part of the town they were in." He paused. "Why do you wish to know?"

"I am a little bit anxious about a friend of mine," said Tony frankly. "He has been running a motor company in Portriga for the last two years, and from what he has told me I am afraid that he has made one or two rather awkward enemies—business enemies, you know. They are not the sort of crowd to miss a chance like this, and just in case he was in difficulties, I should like him to know that the *Betty* was coming to Braxa. Then if he wanted to slip out of the country quietly he could."

Congosta accepted the explanation in what appeared to be perfectly good faith.

"I understand," he said. "You shall give me your friend's name and address, and then if our people can reach him you may be sure that he will get your message."

Tony walked across to the writing-table and seated himself in the chair.

"That's good," he said cheerfully. "One doesn't like to leave a pal in the lurch—especially in Livadia."

He took a sheet of paper from the case in front of him, and in his best handwriting copied out the following address.

SEÑOR JAMES DALE,
Garage Anglais,
Praca D. Porto,
Portriga.

"I think it would be simplest," he said, "if you just told him that the *Betty* was expected at Braxa in two days' time. He would probably like to see me, even if there's nothing the matter."

Congosta took the paper and glanced at its contents.

"If the thing is possible it shall be done," he repeated.

Tony put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his cheque book.

"And now let's get to work," he observed. I shall be pretty busy if we are going to sail to-morrow

morning, so I think I had better leave the cartridge business entirely to you. I will give you an open cheque on my bank, and you can cash it on your way back."

Congosta nodded his approval. "That will be the easiest plan," he said. "Then I can also make the arrangements for sending them off."

"'Steam yacht *Betty*, Southampton,' will be enough address," continued Tony, writing the cheque as he spoke. "I will wire my captain instructions to be on the lookout for them." He blotted the slip and handed it to Congosta. "I don't know what they will come to," he added; "I have made the cheque out for four thousand."

Congosta gazed with surprised awe at the little piece of pink paper in his hand.

"Four thousand pounds?" he repeated slowly. "But it will not be so much as that!"

"Never mind," said Tony, getting up from his chair. "Ask for the rest in gold and bring it back here. We can take it along with us. If your people are as hard up as you say, I daresay a few English sovereigns will come in useful. They are a wonderfully effective weapon with Royalists as a rule."

Congosta folded up the cheque reverently, and put it away in his pocket. Then he picked up his hat.

"Señor!" he exclaimed with a tremble of emotion in his voice. "Again I offer you the thanks of my country. It is only in England that such splendid generosity is possible."

"There's nothing to thank me for," said Tony cheerfully. "It's my own stupidity and carelessness I'm paying for—that's all." He accompanied Congosta across the hall and opened the front door for him. "We shall expect you back here some time this afternoon," he added.

The Livadian nodded.

"I shall return as soon as I have arranged about the cartridges," he said. "It is best that I should not send the message until we know for certain what time you will be able to start."

Once more he clasped Tony's hand and shook it fervently, and then, after giving some instructions to the driver, he stepped into the waiting taxi, and was whirled off down the drive.

Tony came back into the hall, and closed the door. As he did so he caught sight of a note lying at the bottom of the letter-box, and taking it out discovered that it was addressed to himself.

"And now," broke out Guy, who had apparently been restraining himself with difficulty; "perhaps you'll tell me if you are really in earnest."

Tony slit open the envelope and pulled out its contents.

"Of course I'm in earnest," he answered. "I was never so—" He paused abruptly, and his lips screwed themselves up into a sudden low whistle of amused amazement. "By Jove, Guy!" he exclaimed; "look at this!"

He held out the sheet of note-paper, and then thrusting his hands into his pockets, watched his

cousin's face as the latter read through the following missive.

MY DEAR SIR ANTONY CONWAY:

I much regret that I was unable to find time to say good-bye to you before leaving England.

You have a proverb I believe in your delightful language to the effect that he laughs loudest who laughs last. You will now be able to appreciate its profound truth.

Always yours sincerely,

DA FREITAS.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ROYAL PASS

GUY read it through and then looked up with a sort of incredulous bewilderment.

"When did this come?" he asked.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "My dear Guy—I don't know any more about it than you do. I suppose someone must have put it in the letter-box while we were having our pleasant little chat with Congosta."

"But—but—" He stared at it again in frowning uncertainty—"Good Heavens, Tony!" he exclaimed, "do you mean to say that Da Freitas took the trouble and the risk of sending you this while he was actually—?" He broke off as if unable to complete the sentence.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Tony cheerfully. "My respect for the Marquis increases every hour—in fact I'm beginning to feel quite fond of him."

Guy's lips tightened into an expression of restrained exasperation.

"Look here, Tony," he began with forced calmness. "For goodness' sake let's get this thing quite

clear. Did you really mean what you said to Congosta?"

Tony took back Da Freitas' note, and put it carefully in his pocket.

"I meant most of it," he replied. "I am going down to Southampton to-night, and I shall start for Livadia the moment the *Betty* is ready to sail."

Guy knew him well enough to understand that for once he was speaking in absolute sincerity.

"You mean to fight then? You are going to join this man—what's his name—General Almaida?"

There was a short pause.

"Somehow or other," said Tony, "I am going to get Isabel back. It's no good asking me exactly how I shall do it, because at the present moment I don't know. The only thing I have quite made up my mind about is that I shall either come back with her, or else I shan't come back at all." He looked up smilingly at Guy. "Now you understand what I meant when I said I didn't want to drag you into it."

A faint flush mounted into Guy's naturally pale face.

"Do you think I am a coward, Tony?" he inquired very deliberately.

"Of course not," returned Tony. "Any man who has a cold bath as you do every morning must be brave. Still that's no reason why you should run a quite unnecessary risk of getting shot—especially as you have disapproved of the whole business ever since the start."

"Who could help disapproving of it?" burst out Guy feelingly. "It's the maddest and most impossible affair in which any sane person was ever mixed up." He paused as if to recover himself. "All the same," he added quickly, "I should like to come with you, Tony, if you think I could be of any use."

Tony patted him approvingly on the shoulder. "Any use!" he repeated. "Why, my dear old Guy, I would rather have you with me than the Seven Champions of Christendom. I am sure you would be a lot more reliable in a really tight corner."

"Have you got any sort of a plan at all?" inquired Guy a little hopelessly.

"Well, I've an idea," said Tony. "It's hardly a plan yet, but it may be by the time I get back."

"You're going out?"

Tony nodded. "I shan't be long, and meanwhile you can fix up the arrangements here. In the first place I want you to get on to Simmons on the telephone. You had better ring up the Grand Hotel, Southampton, and say you're me, and ask them very prettily and nicely if they'll send round someone to fetch him from the yacht. Tell him that we are coming down to-night or early to-morrow morning—you and I and Bugg—and that he must be ready to start directly we arrive. Say that we have changed our minds about South America and that we are going to Braxa instead."

Guy stepped to the table and made a note of these instructions.

"Anything else?" he inquired.

"Nothing more," replied Tony. "Just see that Spalding packs our things, and that Jennings has the car ready—the Rolls of course. Any spare time you have after that I should devote to making your will."

He picked up his coat off the chair on which it was lying.

"Where are you going to?" asked Guy.

There was a short pause while Tony lighted himself a cigarette.

"I am going to a *matinée*," he said, "at the Gaiety Theatre."

For a moment Guy stared at him in amazement.

"A *matinée*!" he repeated. "What on—" Then suddenly light seemed to dawn on him. "Why, of course, that girl—Molly Monk—I had forgotten her." He paused. "Do you think she can be of any help?"

Tony walked to the door. "She might lend us a sheet of note-paper," he said. "Anyhow I mean to ask her."

If there is one profession in this world more likely than the rest to induce a certain slight cynicism with regard to human motives, it is probably that of being stage door-keeper at the Gaiety Theatre. When therefore a quarter of an hour later, Tony presented his card at the open pigeon-hole with a request that he might see Miss Monk immediately on a matter of urgent importance, the uniformed gentleman inside contented himself with a weary smile.

"I'll send it up, sir," he remarked, "but between ourselves it ain't no good. The Guv'nor don't allow

visitors in the dressin' rooms—not while the show's on."

Tony, who had been fingering a sovereign, laid it down beside the card.

"What a pity!" he replied thoughtfully.

At the sight of the gold piece the janitor's world hardened face lit up with an expression that was almost beautiful.

"I'll take it up meself, sir," he observed hastily, climbing down from his stool. "Of course if it's a matter o' urgent importance—" He emerged from his rabbit hutch, card in hand, and pushing open a swing-door disappeared from view up a winding flight of stairs.

After a decent interval he returned with the air of one who has triumphed over great odds.

"S'orl right," he remarked in a confidential whisper. "She's orf now, sir. You foller me, sir."

He conducted Tony up the stairs, to the first landing, where he tapped cautiously on the second door he came to. It was opened at once by a secretive looking lady, who appeared to be lunching on pins, and at the same moment Molly's voice remarked with its usual pleasant distinctness: "If that's you, Tony, come along in."

Complying with the request Tony found himself in a small, brightly lit apartment, the principal furniture of which appeared to be a vast mirror, a long narrow dressing-table, a comfortable easy-chair, and an inspiring collection of foamy undergarments, suspended from a row of pegs.

In the chair sat Molly. She was dressed in the simple and practical costume of a milkmaid, as visualized by producers of musical comedy. It consisted of a charmingly décolleté creation of white muslin and blue ribbon, completed by a large "baby" hat, a skirt that just reached her knees, white silk stockings and high-heeled shoes.

"Oh, Tony!" she exclaimed; "thank goodness you've come." Then turning to the dresser she added kindly: "You can shove off, Jane. I want to talk to him alone."

Acting on the hint the lady of the pins withdrew from the room, and hardly waiting until the door had closed behind her, Molly jumped up from the chair.

"Have you anything to tell me, Tony?" she asked in a voice that shook a little with excitement. "I know nothing yet except what I've seen in the paper. I have tried to ring you up twice, but——"

"How long have you got now?" inquired Tony.

She glanced at the little silver clock on the dressing-table.

"About ten minutes. Then I have to go on and sing a song, and after that there's the interval."

"I can tell you everything I know in ten minutes," said Tony, "if there are no interruptions."

Molly moved quickly to the door and turned the key in the lock.

"Fire ahead," she observed.

A week earlier Tony would have found it quite impossible to crowd the somewhat eventful history

of the last twenty-four hours into the short time at his disposal. Practice, however, had been improving his powers as a story-teller, and without omitting any really important detail, he actually accomplished the feat with something like a minute and a half to spare.

Molly was certainly an excellent audience. Standing motionless at the door, her lower lip caught tight between her white teeth, she listened to him with rapt attention that never wavered or varied. Even when he had finished she still remained silent for a moment; then with a sudden movement she came towards him, her blue eyes shining with excitement.

"Tony," she said, speaking with a sort of forced calmness "are you absolutely serious about following them? Do you really mean to sail for Braxa tonight?"

"I do," replied Tony with quite unusual sobriety. "You see I have just found out that I am really fond of Isabel, and I don't see any other possible chance of getting her back."

"Do you think this is a possible chance?" She put the question with an earnestness that robbed it of any suggestion of sarcasm.

"Well, it's a bit thin," admitted Tony frankly, "but after all one never knows." He paused. "To a certain extent, Molly," he added, "it depends upon you."

She drew in her breath sharply. "Me?"

Tony nodded. "You're my trump card," he said encouragingly. "You know that signed pass our

friend Peter was obliging enough to give you—the one which he said would take you anywhere if he ever got back to Livadia as king?”

“Yes,” said Molly slowly.

“Well, if you’re not using it for the moment,” continued Tony, “I’d be awful obliged if you’d lend it to me. If it will really do half of what he said it would it might come in devilish handy.”

There was a moment’s pause, and then a clatter of footsteps came hurrying down the passage outside, and someone rapped loudly on the door.

“Miss Monk, please,” shouted a shrill and penetrating voice.

Molly looked round in the direction of the summons.

“All right, Charles,” she called out tranquilly: then turning back she took a momentary glance at herself in the long mirror that hung against the wall.

“I shall be up again in a minute or two, Tony,” she said, skilfully smoothing out a disordered ribbon. “Have a cigarette, and don’t worry yourself about the pass. That will be quite all right.”

“You’ll lend it to me?” exclaimed Tony gratefully.

Molly paused on the threshold and looked back at him with a sort of mischievous elation.

“No,” she said. “I won’t lend it to you; but I’ll bring it with me.”

And with this somewhat staggering announcement she opened the door and disappeared from view.

Whatever effect her remark may have had upon Tony, he appeared to have recovered from it fairly

successfully by the time that she returned. At all events she found him reclining in the easy-chair, enveloped in cigarette smoke, and looking precisely as comfortable and unruffled as when she had left him.

"Was your parting shot serious, Molly?" he asked in that pleasantly serene voice of his.

As he spoke he got up from the chair, and Molly, who was a little out of breath, dropped into the vacant seat.

"It was," she said; "dead, absolute serious. If you want Peter's letter you'll have to take me with you to Livadia." She paused and looked up at him. "Say yes, Tony," she added almost fiercely. "Don't you see that I mean it."

Tony who was gazing down at her with a sort of dispassionate admiration, nodded his head.

"I see you mean it all right, Molly," he said quietly; "but it's a bit of a bomb-shell you know. This won't be exactly a healthy trip if we happen to mess things up."

Molly leaned across to the dressing-table and helped herself to a cigarette.

"Tony dear," she observed. "I know I'm a musical comedy actress, but it doesn't necessarily follow that I'm a complete idiot. I understand perfectly that we're taking on about as risky and hopeless a job as any one could possibly tackle. If Da Freitas finds out I should think the odds are about twenty to one that neither of us will ever come back." She struck a match and lighted her cigarette. "Now are you satisfied?" she inquired.

"Well, you seem to have a fairly sound grip of the situation," admitted Tony. "Still that doesn't make it any the less of a large order." He paused. "Good Lord, Molly, why it's madness—stark staring madness!"

"I don't see it," returned Molly obstinately. "A wife's place is by her husband's side—especially when he has run away with another woman."

In spite of himself Tony laughed. "But supposing we reach Livadia—suppose we actually get into Portriga—what can you do even then?"

"What's the good of asking me that?" demanded Molly. "I don't know any more than you do—not till the time comes. The only thing is—" She broke off, as though not quite sure how to continue.

"Well?" said Tony encouragingly.

"It's just an idea—nothing else at present, but—but you have told me several times that this girl and I are almost exactly alike."

Tony nodded. He was staring at her with a sudden expression of freshly aroused interest.

"Well, don't you see?" Molly threw away her cigarette and rose to her feet. "Surely it's just possible that somehow—by some sort of a chance—we might be able to make use of this to help us." She laughed almost hysterically. "Oh, I know it sounds wild and mad, but what notion have you got that's any better?"

Tony took a couple of paces to the door, and back to where she was standing.

"By Jove, it's an idea, Molly!" he said slowly.

"If we could get you there without being found out——"

"I have thought of that," she interrupted. "I was thinking of it all the time I was on the stage." She paused. "Tony—you remember that song I was singing a couple of years ago—the one in which I used to dress up as a curate?"

He nodded.

"Well, I've still got the things I wore—the clothes and the wig and the spectacles—in fact the whole get-up. It was so good that once, just for a joke, I went out into the street in it. I walked the whole way down the Strand, and not a soul spotted that there was anything wrong."

The old gleam of mischievous amusement leaped into Tony's eyes.

"Good Lord, Molly!" he said. "And you propose to take the trip—in those?"

"Why not?" she demanded. "I can carry it through all right—really and truly I can. After all there's no reason you couldn't have a curate on board, is there?"

"None at all," said Tony. "Oh, none at all." He leaned against the wall and began to laugh, gently and joyously.

Molly faced him with shining eyes. "Then you'll take me?" she exclaimed.

Again Tony nodded his head. "I'll take you, Molly," he answered, "if it's only for the sake of seeing Guy's face."

There was another clatter and shuffle of footsteps

outside, and the voice of the call-boy came echoing down the passage.

"Beginners, Act two, please!"

Tony stopped laughing. "How about your work? How about your part here at the theatre?" he asked.

"Oh, damn the theatre," said Molly simply. "I've got a very good understudy, and they'll have to put up with her." She glanced again rapidly at the clock. "Listen, Tony—we've got exactly two minutes, and then I must start changing. I shall have to have the dresser in, and we can't talk in front of her. Tell me now—right away—just what you want me to do."

For a moment Tony reflected rapidly.

"I think the best plan will be for you to motor down with me," he said. "I can send Guy and Bugg in one car with Jennings, and call for you at your place with the other. I shan't tell Guy anything about it until you're safe on board."

"Why?" asked Molly. "Do you think he'll mind?"

"I am sure he will," said Tony cheerfully. "But it will be too late for him to do anything then unless he tries to throw you into the sea." He paused. "Can you be ready by nine-thirty sharp?"

Molly nodded. "I won't keep you waiting," she said.

There was a knock at the door, and having been granted permission to enter, the secretive looking dresser reappeared on the scene.

"Beg pardon for hinterrupting, Miss," she ob-

served apologetically, "but it's time you was startin' to change."

"Quite right, Jane," said Molly. She turned to Tony and held out her hand. "Well, thanks for coming and looking me up, Tony," she added. "See you again quite soon, I hope."

Tony raised her hand and kissed the tip of her fingers. "Why, yes," he said; "we'll probably run across each other before long."

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It was just twenty minutes later when Lady Jocelyn's pretty parlour maid opened the door of the drawing-room at Chester Square, and in a slightly agitated voice, for such a well trained retainer, announced the arrival of Sir Antony Conway.

Tony, who had followed hard upon her heels, came straight up to the sofa, where, as usual, his aunt was sitting. She looked older and very frail, and her thin hands trembled a little as she stretched them to greet him.

"Tony!" she exclaimed, "my dear boy!"

He sat down beside her, holding her hands in his.

"Aunt Fanny," he said severely; "you have been breaking my rules. You know that you're never allowed to look unhappy or worried."

"It wasn't altogether my fault it happened, Tony," she said. "I would have given my stupid useless old life twice over to have stopped it."

In a tender, half jesting fashion he slipped his arm round her. "You mustn't talk like that, Aunt

Fanny dear," he said. "In fact you mustn't talk at all. You must just sit still and listen to me. There is no time for anything else."

Lady Jocelyn clasped her hands in her lap. "Go on," she said quietly.

All the way from the Gaiety to the house, Tony had been pondering in his mind just how much of the truth it would be advisable to tell. Knowing his aunt, he was not afraid that she would try to dissuade him from his purpose, however dangerous it might appear; he was merely anxious to present it in as favourable a light as possible, so as to spare her any avoidable anxiety.

With this idea he omitted all reference to the attempt upon the *Betty*, confining himself entirely to a description of Congosta's visit. He repeated the latter's story of what had happened to Isabel, and went on to relate how the plan for a possible rescue had been promptly and happily conceived. By means of a little judicious colouring he was able to make it appear a far more feasible proposition than when it had originally presented itself in the hall of Goodman's Rest.

Of his subsequent visit to the Gaiety he said nothing at all. Molly's presence on board the *Betty* in the guise of a curate might or might not be of assistance, but from the point of view of inspiring confidence in the enterprise, it seemed to be one of those features which were better suppressed.

Lady Jocelyn listened to him without interruption. Her face betrayed nothing of what she was feeling,

and for a moment after he had finished speaking, Tony was under the impression that his well meant efforts had been entirely successful. Then, with her faint kindly smile, she laid her hand upon his sleeve.

"Thank you, Tony dear," she said. "It was good of you to come and tell me all this, and it was nicer still of you to have told it in the way you have. Of course I don't really believe you. I am quite sure it's a much more dangerous business than you make out, but as long as there is the shadow of a chance of helping Isabel I should be the last to try and dissuade you. Go, Tony, and do what you can for her; and God bless you and help you."

There was a short pause, and then Tony bent forward and kissed her.

"I am glad you love Isabel," he said simply.

"She is the sweetest and bravest girl I have ever known," answered Lady Jocelyn. "If you can't save her from this marriage, Tony, I think it will break my heart."

Tony got up from the sofa, and buttoned his coat.

"Don't you worry about that, Aunt Fanny," he said. "Peter won't get her—not if I have to shoot him at the altar rails."

CHAPTER XIX

JIMMY DALE

"THAT," said Captain Simmons, "is Braxa."

He pointed out ahead to where the desolate-looking sandy coast that they had been skirting for some hours rose suddenly into an irregular line of hills and cliffs.

"If you have a look through these," he added, "you'll be able to see the entrance to the bay."

Tony, who was standing beside him on the bridge, lightly clad in blue silk pyjamas and a Norfolk jacket, took the proffered glasses and levelled them in the direction indicated. In the bright early morning sunshine he could plainly make out the small opening in the coastline, behind which a number of pink and white houses could be seen straggling picturesquely up the hillside.

"It looks a very nice place," he said generously. "How long do you think it will take us to get there?"

Captain Simmons glanced at his watch. "We shall make the point in about three quarters of an hour," he said. "We ought to be at anchor by half-past nine."

"In that case," said Tony, "I shall go and have

some breakfast. I shall be much too excited to eat eggs and bacon when we're once in the harbour."

He left the bridge, and after pausing for a moment on the warm deck to take another appreciative glance round at the sunlit expanse of blue sky and foam-flecked sea, he pursued his leisurely way down the main companion to his cabin.

A quarter of an hour later he emerged again looking very cool and comfortable in a well cut suit of grey flannels. Nothing would ever induce him to adopt a more conventional form of yachting costume; his own explanation being that white duck and blue serge invariably made him sea-sick.

As he passed along the passage on his way to the saloon, a cabin door swung open and someone stepped out almost into his arms. It was Molly, but any one who could have recognized the fact without being told so must have possessed an extraordinary acuteness of perception.

As far as outward appearance went she was as sound and convincing a curate as the most fastidious vicar could possibly demand. Even the cleverest actresses, when they dress up as men, nearly always betray the fact in a dozen ways, but except for a certain delicacy of feature, there was absolutely nothing about her to arouse the faintest suspicion. With her gold-rimmed spectacles and her smoothly brushed and amazingly natural wig, she looked a perfect specimen of that rather fragile type of young clergyman, who is apt to stir a tender and

half maternal passion in the hearts of middle-aged spinsters.

Tony, who had had forty-eight hours in which to become accustomed to this masterpiece, stopped and gazed at her in fresh and profound admiration.

"It's marvellous, Molly," he observed, "absolutely marvellous! Every time I look at you I feel exactly as if I was going to say grace."

She laughed and in a rather unclerical fashion, slid her arm through his.

"Well, come along and do it then," she said. "I'm quite ready for breakfast."

They made their way to the saloon, where they found Guy already established, and the steward in the very act of bringing in the coffee. Guy's face was a little pale—the result of a slight attack of seasickness on the previous day, and disapproval which had been stamped firmly on it ever since he had found out that Molly was to accompany them on the trip.

"Do you know," said Tony, as they seated themselves at the table, "that in an hour's time we shall be at anchor in Braxa Harbour?"

There was an exclamation from both his companions.

"I didn't realize we were as near as that," said Guy.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" demanded Molly. "I should have gone up on deck to have a look."

"I thought you had better have your breakfast

first," said Tony. "It's very bad for one to get excited on an empty tummy." He helped himself handsomely to eggs and bacon. "Besides we must be very careful how we show ourselves at present. The skipper says there's a coast-guard station at the entrance to the bay, and if it's still in working order they have probably got us under observation already."

"Do you think they'll want to come and search us when we reach the harbour?" asked Guy a little apprehensively.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "That's what they're there for," he said; "but when there's a revolution and two or three civil wars buzzing about, people are apt to get a little careless in their work. Anyhow I'm not worrying myself about that. Our dear old friend Colonel Saltero is expecting us, and you can be quite sure he doesn't mean to have his cartridges mopped up by any one else." He paused to refill his cup. "What I'm thinking about is Jimmy," he added. "It will make all the difference in the world if Jimmy can only manage to get on board before the Colonel does. We shall have some sort of a notion where we are then."

"I shouldn't think there was much chance of it," observed Molly.

"You never know," said Tony hopefully. "There's a lot of resource about Jimmy. A money-lender once spent six weeks trying to serve a writ on him, and he couldn't do it even then."

There was a knock at the cabin door, and in answer

to Tony's "Come in," one of the crew presented himself on the threshold.

"If you please, Sir Ant'ny," he began, "the Captain's compliments, and there's a party o' the name o' Dale signallin' to us from a small cutter to starboard. Says 'e's a friend o' yours, sir. The Capt'n wants to know if we shall stop and pick him up."

There was a dramatic pause, and then Tony wheeled round in his chair so as to face the speaker.

"Pick him up!" he repeated. "Why I should think so, Jackson. Pick him up tenderly—touch him with care. Tell Captain Simmons I'll be up on deck myself as soon as I've finished this piece of bacon."

With a grin and a salute, the sailor departed, and turning back to the table, Tony gazed triumphantly at Guy and Molly.

"Well, my children," he observed; "what did uncle tell you?"

Molly pushed back her plate. "It was a put-up job, Tony," she said, "you knew he was there."

"I didn't," retorted Tony, "on my honour. There wasn't a boat of any kind in sight when I was on the bridge. I feel it's a sign that Providence approves of us."

Molly looked at him and saw that he was speaking the truth.

"Well, we've started," she said with a little triumphant laugh. "Can I come up with you?"

Tony shook his head. "I think you had better lie

low for the present," he answered. "You're the Queen of Trumps in this game, Molly, and we don't want to play you too soon."

Molly looked a trifle disappointed, but she raised no objection. "All right," she said obediently. "I'll save myself up for the King."

Tony rose from the table. "I'll bring Jimmy down as soon as he's on board," he said. "You had better get out the whisky and soda. He's sure to be hungry."

He left the cabin, followed by Guy, and making his way up the companion, stepped out on to the smooth and spotless deck.

The *Betty* had slowed down almost completely and only a faint ripple in her wake showed that she was still moving. Hove to, a little distance ahead, lay a small cutter of about seven tons, from which a dinghy with a couple of men on board was just putting out.

They rowed rapidly across the intervening water so as to cut off the yacht, and timing it to perfection reached their destination just as she was practically ceasing to move. An accommodation ladder had been let down over the side, and Jimmy, a stout and happy looking young gentleman who was crouching in the bows, grabbed hold of it neatly as it came alongside. The next moment he had scrambled on board, and the boat with its solitary occupant was drifting away astern.

"Once aboard the lugger—" observed the newcomer in an extraordinarily soft voice, and then

with a faint chuckle he stepped forward and clasped Tony's outstretched hand. "Hope I haven't come too early?" he added cheerfully.

Tony wrung his hand, and taking a pace backwards surveyed him with an affectionate approval.

"My dear Jimmy," he said. "You come like the flowers in May."

"And I may mention," added Jimmy, transferring his grip to Guy, "that I come after a prolonged and distressing drought."

Tony smiled happily. "I have ordered breakfast for you," he said. "We will go straight down, as soon as I have introduced you to the skipper."

Captain Simmons, who had left the bridge, was advancing along the deck towards them.

"This is my friend Jimmy Dale, Captain," said Tony. "He is one of Portriga's most distinguished citizens."

"That so?" said the skipper extending a huge brown paw. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Dale. Perhaps you can tell us what's going on ashore, and whether we're likely to hit any trouble if we run straight in to Braxa."

"I shouldn't think so," replied Jimmy in his soft and pleasing voice. "As far as I know all the able-bodied officials in Braxa have pushed off to Portriga to join in the looting. I believe there are one or two policemen left, but I don't suppose they are awake yet."

"We won't disturb 'em," said the Captain. "We'll come in nice and quiet, and let 'em have their

nap out. Do you know the harbour at all, Mr. Dale?"

"Pretty fair," said Jimmy. "I've been out fishing in it a good number of times."

"Well, perhaps when we get round the Head you wouldn't mind coming up on the bridge. I've never been in here before, and there might be one or two points I'd be glad of a little information about."

"I'll bring him along," said Tony. "How soon will he be wanted?"

"Oh, there's no hurry," replied the Captain genially. "Plenty o' time for a good breakfast. We shan't be off the Head for another twenty minutes yet."

He turned to retrace his steps, and after offering Jimmy a cigarette, Tony started to lead the way below.

Molly was still sitting at the table when they entered the saloon, and at the unexpected sight Jimmy's good-natured countenance betrayed a momentary surprise and embarrassment.

"Ah, I forgot to tell you we had a friend with us," said Tony easily. "Let me introduce you. The Reverend Mr. Monk—my old pal Jimmy Dale."

They shook hands gravely—an action which proved nearly too much even for the sedate Guy, who turned away hastily to hide his expression.

"Dear old James," said Tony. "It's so nice to see you again. Have some eggs and bacon?"

Jimmy sat down at the table and automatically pulled the whisky and soda towards himself.

"I'll have anything that's going," he replied obligingly. "But what I should like best of all are a few explanations. At present I feel as if I was taking a small part in a cinematograph film."

He squirted a modest supply of soda into his tumbler, and accepted the well supplied plate which Molly handed across to him.

"You shall have everything in a minute if you are good and patient," said Tony encouragingly. "To start with, however, there are one or two questions that we want to ask you. You mayn't be aware of it, Jimmy, but at the present moment you are a very valuable and important person."

"I felt it," said Jimmy; "I felt it directly I stepped on board." He took a deep and apparently much welcome drink, and set down the tumbler.

"We want you to tell us," went on Tony, "exactly what's been happening in Livadia since the day before yesterday. We know all about the beginning of the Revolution, but we are not quite up-to-date with the last part."

"The day before yesterday," repeated Jimmy thoughtfully. "Let's see—that was Thursday, wasn't it? There's been such a lot of blood and noise and free drinks about that I've got a bit mixed up in my dates." He paused to take a large mouthful of egg and bacon. "Thursday," he continued a little indistinctly, "was just about the brightest and breeziest day we've had. It was the morning that Almaida made his big attack on the Royalists, and they were scrapping from eight o'clock until three or

four in the afternoon. They would have gone on longer, only all the wine shops had been cleaned out by then and everybody was so thirsty that they had to stop."

"And what happened?" asked Guy. "Who got the best of it?"

"Well, I suppose it was more or less of a drawn battle," returned Jimmy indifferently. "Almaida managed to cross the river and bag the railway station and the Town Hall, but as they'd both been burned to the ground I don't suppose he got much for his trouble. It was quite a merry little romp while it lasted though."

Tony reached across for the whisky and helped himself to a companion peg.

"What did you do in the great war, Daddy?" he inquired.

"Me!" said Jimmy. "Oh, I was a very good little boy. I hoisted the Union Jack, and stopped in my own house, and when any one tried the front door I fired at them out of the window. I don't think I hit anybody—I'm such a putrid shot with a revolver."

"Well, you did your best," said Tony consolingly, "and that's all that really matters."

Jimmy shook his head. "I used up a lot of cartridges," he objected, "and they cost no end of money out here. Besides I should like to have slaughtered just one Livadian. One doesn't often get the chance of doing such a good turn to humanity."

"But how about the Revolution?" broke in Guy a trifle impatiently. "What happened after the fighting came to an end?"

"Oh, the fighting didn't come to an end," returned Jimmy. "It was only the battle. People went on shooting each other privately all night, and next morning there was some sort of an attempt at another general engagement. It was nothing like Thursday, however, because both sides were running short of ammunition. However, I thought it seemed healthier indoors, so I stayed where I was until about three o'clock, when I suddenly noticed that the shooting was beginning to stop, and that the people were gathering together into groups and jawing and jabbering like a lot of monkeys. I guessed that something had happened, so I loaded up my revolver and shoved on a hat, and tootled out into the sunshine."

He paused to select a cigar from the case which Tony was holding out to him.

"Almost the first person I ran into," he went on, "was a man I happened to know. I asked him what was up, and he told me that there was a report all over the town that Pedro and Da Freitas had just arrived from England with Don Francisco's daughter, and that she and the King were going to be married at once. Well, of course, that put the hat on everything so to speak. Whatever Almaida's private notions may have been, he was nominally fighting to make this girl Queen of Livadia, and if she was really going to be married to Pedro, the whole thing was nothing but a damned farce." He coughed

and turned to Molly. "Sorry, Padre," he added apologetically. "Forgot you were here."

Molly inclined her head gravely, and once again Guy turned away to conceal his emotions.

"Go on, James," said Tony in a reassuring voice. "You needn't be afraid of shocking Mr. Monk. He has been chaplain to a bishop."

"There's not so very much more to tell," said Jimmy. "At first, of course, most of Almaida's people thought it was just a bluff on the part of the Royalists—a sort of trick to try and upset 'em and then catch 'em on the hop. By six o'clock, however, posters and bills began to be shoved up all over the place. No one seemed to know who was doing it, but there they were as large as life, saying that the marriage would come off in the Cathedral on Sunday morning, and calling upon all the Franciscans to lay down their arms. I was coming back home, when I found one of them stuck up on the post-office wall, almost exactly opposite my house. I stopped to have a look, and while I was reading it a chap came sidling down the street and pulled up alongside of me. He was a pretty average looking sort of scoundrel, with a dirty bandage round his head instead of a cap. I could see that he was squinting at me out of the corner of his eye, and I was just wondering whether I'd better move on quietly or plug him hard on the jaw, when he suddenly asked me in a hoarse whisper if I was the Señor James Dale. I told him I was, and then to my utter astonishment he gabbled out some message to the effect that you were coming

to Livadia and that the *Betty* was expected at Braxa early this morning. It fairly took my breath away for a minute, and before I could ask him a single question some more people came round the corner of the street, and he skidded off like a rat when it sees a terrier."

Tony laughed softly. "Have another drink, James," he suggested. "I'm sorry to have given you these nervous shocks, but we were rather pressed for time."

"Oh, I rallied all right," said Jimmy, helping himself to a second peg. "It was a bit of a thunderbolt for a moment, but knowing your taste in amusements I realized at once that it was just the sort of time you would choose for a pleasure trip to Livadia. Of course I hadn't a notion how you had managed to get the message through to me, but after all that didn't really matter. The great thing was to get to Braxa in time to meet you."

He paused to refresh himself.

"How did you manage it?" inquired Guy. "I suppose there are no trains running or anything of that sort."

"The only thing that's running in Livadia at the present moment is blood," returned Jimmy cheerfully. "Fortunately for me, however, I'd got a car. I sneaked it out of the garage quietly on Monday when the trouble started, and I had it locked up in a sort of out-house at the back of my place. I knew, of course, that I hadn't a dog's chance of getting out of the town with it on my own, so without fooling

around I went straight off to the British Consulate, which is quite close to where I live. I managed to get hold of Watson himself, and he gave me a letter saying that I was a British subject, and if anybody interfered with me all sorts of giddy things would happen to him. Of course it wasn't exactly a gilt-edged security in a time like this: still it was the best thing I could get, and I thought that with the help of a bit of bluff it might pull me through." He paused. "Well, to cut a long yarn short, it did. I had a little trouble on the road, but I reached Braxa at last—about three o'clock this morning—and knocked up an old boy that I used to go fishing with. I explained the situation to him—more or less—and we came to the conclusion that the best plan would be to pick you up outside the harbour. He helped me stuff away the car in an old shed he's got up at the top of the jetty; then we just tumbled into his boat and—and—well, here we are." He leaned back and surveyed his companions. "And now," he added placidly, "perhaps you'll be kind enough to let me know what the devil it all means."

There was a brief pause.

"I'll tell him if you like," offered Guy.

Tony glanced at his watch. "I think you had better leave it to me," he said. "We shall be wanted on deck in a few minutes, and I've had such a lot of practice, I'm sure I can tell it quicker than any one else." He turned to Jimmy. "It's an exciting story, James; but you must listen very carefully and not interrupt me."

Mr. Dale crossed his legs. "Let her rip," he observed tranquilly.

Once more, and this time with a masterly brevity that put all his previous efforts in the shade, Tony proceeded to relate the series of stimulating incidents which had sprung from his chance encounter with Isabel outside the Long Acre flats. Owing to his highly condensed method it was impossible to avoid a certain obscurity about some of the details, but obedient to his instructions Jimmy received it all in unquestioning silence.

For a moment, even after Tony had finished, he still remained mute; then with a sudden soft little chuckle he got up from his chair, and thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets.

"My sainted Aunt!" he observed. "If ever there was a purple picnic on this earth it seems to me we've struck it." He paused, as though overwhelmed with the magnificence of the situation. "And this girl," he went on slowly, "this girl who's so like the Princess? Do you really mean to say that you have brought her with you—that you've got her here—on board?"

"We have," replied Tony, "very much so."

Jimmy glanced round the cabin. "Well, where is she? What have you done with her?"

Tony turned his seat in the direction of the Rev. Mr. Monk.

"Get up, Molly," he said. "Get up and make the gentleman a nice curtsy."

With her most bewitching smile, Molly rose to her

feet, and picking up the skirts of her coat in either hand, sank gracefully towards the floor.

For an instant, for just one poignant instant, Jimmy remained gazing at her in open-mouthed incredulity; and then with an apologetic rap on the door the seaman Jackson again presented himself on the threshold.

“If you please, Sir Ant’ny—the Capt’n’s compliments, and he’d be glad to see you and the other gentleman on the bridge.”

CHAPTER XX

COUNTERPLOTING

It would have been difficult to find anything more restful looking than Braxa Harbour, as it lay flooded in the morning sunshine. Whatever bloodthirsty events might have taken place further inland, they had certainly failed to produce any visible effect upon this tranquil little fishing village.

From the bridge of the *Betty*, which had come to anchor a couple of hundred yards off the end of the long stone jetty, there was nothing to be seen that in any way broke the agreeable atmosphere of peace and harmony. Except for a few old boats, the sandy beach was absolutely deserted, while the pink and white houses, that clambered up the hill at the back, seemed pleasantly asleep in the shadow of their surrounding trees. Round a low headland on the right, a small river meandered out into the bay, its tranquil current being plainly visible against the clear blue of the sea water.

"I've seen livelier looking places," observed Captain Simmons critically, "but I can't say I ever saw a much more dangerous harbour for a big yacht, not if it should come on to blow from the sou'-west."

Tony leaned meditatively over the rail and inspected the prospect.

"I'm afraid we have arrived a little early," he said. "The Mayor and Corporation don't seem to be up yet."

"Oh, there's never much of a rush here in the morning," remarked Jimmy, who was standing beside him. "I once saw a dog on the beach before breakfast, but I think he'd been out all night." He tossed the stump of his cigar over the side and watched it drop down into the water. "What do we do now?" he inquired.

"Well, considering that we've come by invitation," answered Tony, "I should say the best thing was to sit tight and admire the view. Somebody will probably notice that we've arrived, sooner or later."

With a sudden movement the Captain raised his glasses, and levelled them on the point away to the right where the river ran out into the bay.

"Seems to me," he observed, "that somebody's noticed it already."

He pointed to the headland, and as he did so both his companions suddenly caught sight of something low and black in the water that was moving slowly out of the mouth of the river.

"It's a petrol launch," said the skipper, "and unless I'm much mistaken they're coming along to say good-morning to us."

With quiet deliberation Tony surveyed the advancing vessel, which was already swinging round in the direction of the *Betty*.

"I can't see any one yet," he announced, "but it's pretty sure to be Colonel Saltero. Jimmy, you'd better go downstairs and lock yourself in the bathroom with Molly. I don't want him to know that we're a passenger steamer."

"Right you are," said Jimmy with alacrity. "Come and tell us when it's all over."

He climbed down the bridge ladder, whistling tunefully to himself, and turning back towards the approaching launch, Tony again scrutinized it carefully through his glasses.

As it drew nearer he was able to see that there were three men on board, and amongst them he soon made out the square-shouldered, aggressive figure of Colonel Saltero. That distinguished warrior was seated in the stern, and even from a considerable distance one could detect the air of truculent authority with which he was directing operations.

Tony snapped his glasses together and turned to the skipper.

"I think I had better go down on the deck, and prepare to make pretty speeches," he said. "I suppose they will be able to come alongside all right."

Captain Simmons eyed his advancing visitors with an air of mistrustful calculation.

"I wouldn't go as far as that," he observed grimly, "but I dare say they'll manage it somehow or other."

"Never mind," said Tony, "paint's cheap."

He descended in leisurely fashion to the deck, and walked across to the starboard side, where the mem-

bers of the crew had collected together awaiting the skipper's orders.

A little apart from the others, and leaning over the rail, stood Mr. McEwen and "Tiger" Bugg. For some obscure reason these two had struck up an immediate and firm friendship, with the result that Bugg had spent practically the entire trip in the breezy atmosphere of the engine-room.

Tony strolled up and joined them.

"Guid-morning to ye, Sir Antony," observed the chief engineer removing his pipe.

"Good-morning, Mr. McEwen," said Tony. "Having a look at the visitors?"

There was a pause.

"I was wondering," said Mr. McEwen softly, "whether yon swab who put that nine-inch spanner in my cylinder might be amang the pairty."

Tony shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he replied regretfully.

There was a sudden exclamation of interest from Bugg.

"Why, look, sir! See 'im, sir? It's the cross-eyed bloke. The one I knocked aht in Long Acre."

He pointed excitedly towards the approaching launch, above which the sombre scowl of Colonel Saltero was now plainly visible to the naked eye.

"You're quite right, Bugg," said Tony. "It's the same gentleman, but he is coming to see me this time in a nice friendly spirit, so perhaps you had better keep out of the way. He mightn't like to be reminded of that push in the face."

With his usual ready obedience Bugg faded from the scene, and as he did so the voice of Captain Simmons came curtly and incisively from the bridge.

"Stand by with the fender, and look out for our paint."

A couple of the crew, under the direction of the second officer, hurried to fulfil the order, while two others climbed over the rail, ready to drop down and assist in the operation.

Shutting off her engine as she approached, the launch came swirling round in a half circle. There was a brief moment of strained suspense, and then skilfully avoiding the fender, she bumped heavily alongside, in a fashion that brought a cry of anguish from Captain Simmons' lips. The two waiting sailors dropped nibly on to her deck, and commenced to make her fast, and the next moment, flushed but triumphant, Colonel Saltero was mounting the accommodation ladder.

As he emerged over the top, Tony stepped forward to meet him.

"How d'you do, Colonel?" he observed in a friendly voice. "Glad to see you again."

Clicking his heels together, Colonel Saltero made him a stiff military bow.

"Permit me, Sir Antony," he replied, "to welcome you to Livadia."

"Thanks very much," said Tony. Then pausing for a moment to allow his visitor to recover a perpendicular position, he added hospitably: "Come along down and have a whisky."

The invitation did not seem to be altogether unwelcome, but like a true soldier the Colonel's first considerations were evidently for his duty.

"You have brought the cartridges?" he demanded, with a swift and slightly suspicious glance round the deck.

"Rather," said Tony, "any amount of 'em." He turned to the second officer "You had better start getting those boxes on board the launch right away," he added. "Colonel Saltero and I are going below to have a little chat."

He led the way down the companion to his private cabin, and ushering his guest in closed the door behind them.

"Well, you got Congosta's message all right then," he said, going to the cupboard and getting out the whisky and soda. "You know what an unholy mess I've managed to make of things."

The Colonel, who was standing in a stiff and military attitude, made a slight gesture of assent.

"Sir Antony!" he said, "I am a soldier, and it is my habit to speak plain words. I will not hide my opinion that with regard to the Princess you have failed us badly."

Tony splashed out a full-handed allowance of old Glenlivet and sprinkled it carefully with soda.

"Go on," he said encouragingly. "Say exactly what you like."

He handed the glass to the Colonel, who took a long and apparently satisfactory drink.

"At the same time," continued the latter, "I

do not wish to be ungrateful. If what Señor Congosta tells me is true, you have done your best to make up for your fault. These cartridges—" he set down the empty tumbler—"these cartridges, which I understand you have presented to the army, may yet be the means of saving Livadia."

"That's good," observed Tony. "But how are you going to get them to Portriga?"

The Colonel made a gesture with his hand. "There is no difficulty. The river which you see runs up within two miles of the town, and both banks are strongly held by our men."

"What about the people here—the coast-guards and police? Are they on your side?"

Colonel Saltero smiled sombrely. "There are no coast-guards left," he said. "As for the police—" he shrugged his shoulders—"some say that the officer in command here is a friend of Da Freitas, but I do not think he will interfere with us."

Tony stretched out his hand, and picking up his guest's empty glass commenced to refill it.

"That sounds all right as far as it goes," he remarked; "but it seems to me we are up against another pretty stiff problem. If Pedro marries the Princess' as I suppose he will, it rather knocks the bottom out of your game—doesn't it?"

For a moment the Colonel hesitated. Despite the gift of the cartridges, some faint suspicion of Tony's entire good faith seemed still to linger in his mind.

"We are not without our plans," he replied cautiously.

Without appearing to notice the implied mistrust Tony filled the tumbler and handed it back to him.

"Of course not," he remarked cheerfully. "You and Señor Congosta are not the sort of people to leave things to chance. I was only wondering if I couldn't be of any further help to you. It was all my fault the Princess was captured, and I want to do everything I can to make up for it."

This frank and simple speech, or else a second long draught of Glenlivet which the Colonel promptly poured down his throat, seemed to have a slightly mellowing effect upon that reserved warrior.

"We have a plan," he repeated, "but I will admit to you, Sir Antony, that there is much danger. Even now it is known everywhere that the Princess is in Da Freitas' hands, and already there are those who say 'what is the use of more fighting?' If we had money——"

"Money!" exclaimed Tony. "My dear chap, why didn't you say so before?" He crossed again to the cupboard, and stooping down took out two fat white bags, which he placed upon the table with an agreeable chink.

"I thought it just possible you might be short of cash," he explained, "so I brought a couple of thousand along with me."

The Colonel's eyes glistened.

"In gold?" he asked hoarsely.

Tony loosened the mouth of one of the bags, and tipped out a little shining stream of yellow coins.

"All in the best English sovereigns," he said, gathering them up and replacing them again. Then, with a graceful gesture, he pushed both bags across the table. "Take them, Colonel," he added. "Take them from me as a small gift towards the freedom of Livadia."

For a moment the Colonel was too overcome to speak.

"Sir Antony," he exclaimed at last, "you must give me your pardon. Congosta was right in what he said. I did you a great wrong in ever doubting your honour." He raised his half empty glass. "I drink," he said, "to the saviour of my country."

Tony bowed. "That," he replied, "is a title which I think already belongs to you—or Señor Congosta."

There was a dramatic pause, and then the Colonel set down his glass.

"I will tell you," he said bluntly, "what it is that we propose to do. It is right that you should know." With an instinctive glance round the cabin, as if to make quite certain that there were no eavesdroppers, he advanced towards the table. "In the afternoon, yesterday," he went on, "Pedro and Da Freitas landed in Portriga. They have brought the Princess and the Count de Sé with them. Already there are notices, placed up all over the town, saying that on Sunday morning the marriage will take place in the Cathedral."

Tony looked at him with an expression of amaze-

ment. "I say!" he exclaimed. "They haven't wasted much time."

"It is not in the way of Da Freitas to waste time," agreed the Colonel.

For a moment Tony remained silent. "Well, what are you going to do?" he asked. "It seems to me that unless you can stop this interesting little arrangement the whole thing's finished. You can't expect people to go on fighting for a queen who's already on the throne."

Saltero came a step closer still. "There will be no wedding," he said grimly. "By ten o'clock to-night the Princess will be in our hands."

He paused, as if to allow the statement time to sink in.

Tony indulged in a low whistle. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "How are you going to work it?"

Once more the Colonel glanced round the cabin, and then sunk his voice to a kind of low rumble, which was apparently as near as he could get to a whisper.

"We have found out that the Princess has been taken to the Château of Saint Anna. It is in the mountains, ten miles from Portriga. The Count de Saint Anna is an old friend of Pedro's father."

"Are you going to attack the place?" Tony put the question quite quietly, though his fingers had tightened a little upon the cigarette that he was holding.

The Colonel shook his head. "It is impossible. There is only one road up through the hills, and all

the approaches to it are held by Da Freitas' soldiers. A hundred men could defend it against an army."

"It sounds a bit awkward," said Tony.

Colonel Saltero smiled malevolently. "It is our good fortune," he continued, "to have had further information. We have learned that at nine o'clock to-night the Princess will be brought into the town in order that she may be ready for the ceremony in the morning. Doubtless there will be an escort—a strong escort, but all the same—" he paused and his grey eyes narrowed into a couple of dangerous looking slits—"I do not think that they will ever reach Portriga. I do not think that they will get further than the bridge at Valona."

Tony laid down his cigarette. "I hope you will be careful if there's going to be a scrap," he said anxiously. "I shouldn't like anything to happen to Isabel. She seemed rather a nice girl."

The Colonel drew himself up a little stiffly. "Our plans have been well made," he replied. "There will be no danger to the Princess. By ten o'clock she will be safe with General Almada."

There was another and longer pause.

"If it comes off," observed Tony slowly, "it will be a nasty jar for Pedro and Da Freitas."

Once again the Colonel smiled viciously. "It will be the end," he said. "Da Freitas has staked everything upon this marriage, and if he cannot bring forward the Princess on Sunday, the whole country will know that they have been deceived. There will be risings and riots everywhere: even his

own soldiers will turn against him. Then we shall attack again, and this time there will be no going back. Before night comes, Isabella will be Queen of Livadia."

He stooped forward, and gathering up the two bags of gold stepped back from the table.

"Well, it's very good of you to have told me all this," said Tony gratefully. "It has made me feel much more comfortable in my mind." He laid his hand upon the whisky bottle. "Have another drink before we go up?" he suggested.

The Colonel shook his head with some regret.

"I thank you, no," he said. "There are many things to do, and the time is short. With your permission we will return to the deck."

CHAPTER XXI

THE SOLUTION

"AND that," said Tony, leaning back in his chair, "is absolutely every damned thing that I could get out of him."

His three companions, Molly, Guy, and Jimmy, who were seated in various attitudes round the cabin table, surveyed him for a moment in deep and reflective silence.

Then Guy cleared his throat. "On the whole," he said, "I think you have managed remarkably well."

"I did my best," replied Tony modestly, "but he's a reticent blighter for a Colonel. I didn't dare pump him any further for fear that he might get suspicious. As it is I think he was half sorry he had told me as much as he had before I got him over the side."

"Well, we've collected quite a lot of interesting stuff to go on with," said Jimmy contentedly. "The great question is how are we going to use it?"

"Do you know where these two places are?" asked Tony. "The Château of Saint Anna—and the bridge at Valona?"

Jimmy nodded. "Both of 'em. There isn't a

yard of this country I haven't tootled over at some time or other." He looked hopefully at Tony. "Have you got any bright notion at the back of your mind?"

"Not yet," said Tony. "I haven't had the chance of working things out. That's what I've called this Cabinet Council for." He turned to his cousin. "What do you think about it, Guy?" he asked. "You're the eldest, so you shall speak first."

"It seems to me," said Guy deliberately, "that there is not the faintest chance of rescuing Isabel, except by the employment of violence."

There was a soft and delighted chuckle from Jimmy to which he paid no attention.

"That being so," he continued calmly, "the question resolves itself into where and how we should make the attempt. As far as I can see there is only one answer. If we can reach Valona, it's just possible that in the confusion of this attack one or other of us might manage to get away with Isabel. Of course it's much more likely that we shall all be killed, but if one chooses to mix oneself up in this sort of insane business that is an objection which one must be prepared to face."

He closed his lips tight in their customary precise line, and looked round at the assembled company.

"Thank you, Guy," said Tony. "That's just the sort of spirited speech I should have expected from one of your aggressive character." He paused. "Now, Jimmy, what have you got to say?"

Jimmy rose solemnly to his feet. "I have much

pleasure," he observed, "in seconding the proposal of our honourable friend. I'm for a forward policy every time." He looked across the table. "How about the Reverend Mr. Monk?" he added. "It seems to me we ought to have asked his opinion first."

"I think," said Molly sweetly and clearly, "that it's just about the silliest suggestion I ever heard."

Guy sat up suddenly in his chair, and Jimmy, who was still standing on his feet, broke into another long chuckle of laughter.

Tony rapped the table gravely with a teaspoon.

"Order, please," he said, "order! This is no time for misplaced merriment." He turned to Molly. "Don't worry about Guy's feelings," he added kindly. "Say exactly what you think."

"I'm going to," replied Molly with brisk determination. "I'm awfully sorry if I was rude to you, Mr. Oliver; but really you know your plan's a rotter. Do you suppose that even if we got to Valona, these people would allow us to hang about there waiting for something to happen? Why, they would guess what we were up to the very moment they spotted us."

"But we know the time, roughly," protested Jimmy. "We could arrange to reach the place just when the fighting started."

"And what then?" demanded Molly scornfully. "Here you've got a large party of armed men, who are cheerfully ready to murder a whole escort in order to get hold of this girl. Do you really imagine they

are going to let us waltz in and pick her up under their noses? Not likely!"

She stopped to take breath.

"I thought I had made it clear," remarked Guy a little chillingly, "that I didn't regard the suggestion as a very safe or hopeful one."

"You did," said Molly, "but you didn't go half far enough. It's a dead certain frost from the very start. We should just be committing suicide without doing any good to anybody."

Guy shrugged his shoulders. "I daresay you're right. The unfortunate point is that there's no alternative."

Molly leaned forward, her blue eyes shining with excitement.

"Yes, there is," she said quietly.

For an instant nobody spoke.

"Go on, Molly," said Tony. "We are all listening to you."

"If we can get to Valona," said Molly, speaking in a rapid and eager voice, "what is there to stop us getting to the other place—the Château of Saint Anna?"

There was another and longer pause.

"Good Lord!" remarked Jimmy, and with this non-committal observation he reseated himself at the table.

"Well?" continued Molly defiantly. "We can't do anything without running a big risk, so while we're about it we may just as well shove all our money on the best chance."

"But surely," protested Guy, "if there is an utterly hopeless——"

"Let Molly explain," said Tony. "We can criticize her afterwards."

Once again there was a brief silence.

"It's like this," said Molly. "At the present moment, so far as we know, there isn't a soul on Peter's side who has the remotest notion that we're in Livadia. That's our strongest card, and if we don't play it for all it's worth we shall be simply chucking the game away." She wheeled round on Jimmy. "Where is this Château, exactly?" she asked. "Can you get to it from here in your car without going through Portriga or the other place—Valona?"

Jimmy nodded. "We should turn off the main road up into the hills about five miles from here. The car would manage it all right, but as for getting there——" he grinned cheerfully—"well, from what the Colonel told Tony, I should think we had about as much chance as a snowflake in hell."

"You needn't worry about that part of it," returned Molly coolly. "So long as you know the road you can leave the rest to me." She put her hand into her breast pocket, and produced the thick and impressive looking half sheet of note-paper, which she had shown Tony in the flat. "If that won't get us past a few soldiers," she added, throwing it on the table, "we may as well turn the boat round now and go straight home."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tony. "I believe you've got hold of the right idea, Molly!"

Guy looked from one to the other of them in a sort of baffled bewilderment.

"I may be very stupid," he said, "but I can't see in the least what you hope to do even if we reach the Château."

Molly drew in a long breath. "There's only one thing to do," she said slowly. "Somehow or other this Princess girl and I have got to change places. There's absolutely no other way in which we can possibly work it."

If she had suddenly placed a live bomb upon the table, Guy's face could hardly have assumed a more startled expression. Even Jimmy, who did not seem to be easily perturbed, remained staring at her for a moment with his mouth open.

"Change places!" repeated Guy at last. "Are you speaking seriously?"

"Of course I am," said Molly a little impatiently. "Don't you see how easily it could be done? According to what you all tell me, this girl and I are as like each other as two peas: but no one would guess that if they'd only seen me in this rig-out. Well, if I could get a quarter of an hour alone with her, all we should have to do would be to swap clothes, and then she could just walk out of the place instead of me." She swept a triumphant glance at the others. "It's a hundred to one nobody would notice the difference: not if she's got the pluck and sense to carry it off properly."

"I can guarantee the pluck and the sense," said Tony. "They are two things in which Isabel happens to specialize rather deeply."

"But do you mean you are ready to stop behind in her place?"

It was Jimmy who put the question.

"Certainly I am," replied Molly. "That's what I have come out here for."

He gazed at her for a moment in voiceless admiration.

"My Lord, you've got some nerve," he said. "What do you think will happen to you?"

Molly smiled pleasantly. "I think," she answered, "that I shall be respectably and properly married to Peter in the Portriga Cathedral. I don't see what the devil else they can afford to do. They have got to have a wedding, and as I'm quite ready to pretend that I'm the Princess, and nobody's ever likely to contradict it, it seems to me they'll jolly well have to make the best of it."

Tony laid down his cigarette and leaned back in his chair.

"Molly," he said, "you are as brilliant as you are beautiful. I don't believe there is any one else alive who could have thought of a notion like that when they were full of eggs and bacon."

"It's a terrific idea," admitted Jimmy, still gazing respectfully at the author. "The one great difficulty will be to fix up this interview between you and the Princess."

Molly nodded. "I know," she said. "I haven't

got that part of it clear yet. You see the whole thing only came into my head quite suddenly."

"That part of it," remarked Tony in his tranquil voice, "seems to me delightfully simple and easy."

They all three turned towards him.

"We are personal friends of Peter's," he went on; "at least I am. I think I shall call myself Lord Haverstock. It's a very nice title and no one's taken it yet. Do you think it suits me, Guy?"

"Oh, go on," exclaimed Guy impatiently.

"At Peter's suggestion," continued Tony, "I have accompanied him from England in my own yacht, in order to be in at the death, so to speak. Molly here is my chaplain. All really respectable English peers travel with a private chaplain."

He paused as if for confirmation.

"I've no doubt you're right," said Jimmy gravely, "but how does that interesting fact help us?"

"Why, don't you see? Isabel has been brought up with English ideas about these sort of things, and it's surely only natural that she should feel a little upset at the thought of being married so suddenly, and without any of her old friends to help her. She has told Peter that if it was possible she would like to have a talk with an English clergyman, and knowing that I have got the Reverend Mr. Monk on board, Peter has suggested that I should take him along to the Château. Of course, for various reasons, he didn't want a fuss made about it, so he has just given me his own private pass, and told me to explain the rest

to the Count of Saint Anna. What could be more beautifully simple and probable?"

Molly clapped her hands softly. "Splendid, Tony!" she said. "Absolutely splendid!"

"And suppose," remarked Guy in his depressingly matter-of-fact voice, "that the first person we run into at the Château is Isabel's uncle or the Marquis da Freitas or the King himself. What's going to happen then?"

"I don't know exactly," said Tony, "but I should say that in all probability there will be the hell of a row."

"It's no good worrying about that," said Molly decisively. "We've got to chance something, and the odds are that all three of them will be down in Portriga. I imagine that that's why they've sent the girl to this place—in order to have their hands free."

Tony nodded his agreement. "There's a lot of hard work about running a revolution," he observed. "I shouldn't think they would be able to spare anybody this morning."

Molly looked round at the other two. "Well," she said, "Tony and I have made up our minds at all events. Are you ready to back us up?"

There was a pause.

"I will do anything I can," remarked Guy simply.

Jimmy leaned back and thrust his hands into his trouser pockets.

"So will I, of course," he said. "The only thing I

don't like about it is leaving you behind. Suppose they turn nasty when they find out?"

Molly smiled at him comfortingly. "That's all right," she said. "Peter has got his weak points, but if any one was to hurt the tip of my little finger he would have the last drop of blood they've got. Da Freitas knows that as well as I do."

"I'm glad to hear he appreciates you," said Jimmy with feeling. "You are much too good for him." He hesitated. "Look here," he added suddenly, "suppose he's killed, suppose somebody shoots him—it's quite possible you know—will you come back to England and marry me?"

Molly broke into a little ripple of silvery laughter.

"I daresay I might," she said. "Anyhow, it's nice to have something to fall back on in case one wants it."

"I hate to interrupt a really passionate love affair," observed Tony apologetically, "but don't you think we ought to discuss our arrangements—such as they are? We haven't too much time to spare."

"Well, they're pretty straight sailing, aren't they?" replied Jimmy. "There's plenty of petrol in the car, so all we've got to do is to go ashore and start off."

"Who's we?" demanded Molly. "You and I and Tony?"

"Can't I come too?" inquired Guy in a rather disappointed voice. "I'm quite ready to do my share—whatever it is?"

Tony got up from where he was sitting and laid a sympathetic hand on his cousin's shoulder.

"I know that, Guy," he said. "I know that you would cut the throats of half Livadia if it would help Isabel in any way. The point is that we can't afford to do any fighting this trip. We have got to bring it off peacefully, if we bring it off at all, and it's quite possible that the real danger will be at this end, and not at the Château. I told you what Saltero said about the police here. Well, don't you see, if they chose to interfere they might put the hat on everything. I want you to take charge while we're away, and whatever happens—even if you have to murder every policeman in the town—there must be a nice comfy boat awaiting us when we get back."

Guy nodded grimly. "Very well," he said; "you can count on that, if they're any of us left alive!"

CHAPTER XXII

GETTING ACCESS TO ISABEL

It was almost exactly half an hour later, when the *Betty's* gig, skilfully piloted by the second officer, drew up alongside the jetty. Tony, Jimmy, and Molly scrambled out in turn—the latter carrying a small prayer-book in her hand and lending a pleasant air of respectability to the party.

Braxa still lay bathed in a rich tranquillity: the only other occupants of the sun-warmed causeway being a couple of nondescript gentlemen, who had been leaning over the low rail, watching the approach of the boat and spitting thoughtfully into the sea. These two eyed the new arrivals with a certain languid curiosity, but beyond that they betrayed no apparent interest in their proceedings.

"It's amazing to me," said Tony, looking round, "that any one could have had the bad taste to start a revolution here. It's like brawling in a mortuary."

"Oh, you mustn't judge Livadia by this place," protested Jimmy. "There are enough scoundrels in Portriga to make up for any shortage elsewhere." He took out a small rusty key from his pocket. "Come along," he added. "If we hang about admir-

ing the view we shall probably have Saltero's policemen after us."

He led the way down the jetty towards a roughly built wooden shed which stood a few yards back on the beach, and unfastening the padlock, threw open the door. Inside, amongst a medley of fishing nets and other nautical obstructions, stood a large travel-stained motor car with steel studded tyres. It was evidently in good order, for it started with the first pull up of the handle, and having seated himself at the steering-wheel, Jimmy brought it deftly out on to the hard beaten sandy track which ran up into the main road.

"One penny all the way," he observed encouragingly. "Any more for Chancery Lane or the Bank of England?"

Tony closed and locked the door of the shed. "I shall sit behind with you, Molly," he announced. "Then we can hold hands under the rug."

They settled themselves comfortably in the tonneau, and starting on his second speed Jimmy shot off up the beach with surprising and rather disconcerting velocity.

At the top of the track, where it joined the road, several of Braxa's more energetic citizens were sheltering from the rays of the sun. As the car approached they all moved forward in a desultory fashion to scan its occupants; and one of them, a stout gentleman in uniform, with a sword trailing by his side, stepped out officiously into the roadway and held up his hand.

If he was under the impression that his action would cause the car to pull up, he must have been bitterly disappointed. Without faltering, or even slackening speed, its driver swerved round him at a distance of about two inches, and left him shouting and gesticulating wildly in the centre of a cloud of dun coloured dust.

A few yards further on, the road turned away inland, and as soon as they had negotiated the corner, Jimmy glanced back over his shoulder.

"We've torn it now," he observed complacently. "That was one of the policemen."

Tony nodded. "I thought it must be," he said. "He looked so well fed."

"Is there anything he can do?" inquired Molly; "except to try and arrest the *Betty*?"

"He might send a message to Portriga asking for instructions," answered Jimmy. "It all depends on whether he's got a suspicious nature."

He turned back to concentrate his attention on the steering, for they were passing through the main street of Braxa, and one or two small carts, with sleepy-looking pairs of oxen attached to them, were straggling amiably about the roadway.

"I'm sorry now that we didn't run over him," said Molly regretfully.

"We might go back and do it," replied Tony; "but I think on the whole we had better trust to Providence. If Providence is really with us one policeman can't make very much difference."

This argument seemed to convince Molly, for she

attempted no further conversation until they were clear of the village, and travelling rapidly along the sandy and ill kept road which ran northwards towards Portriga.

Then, with a smile, she turned again towards Tony.

"I'm thinking of the ambush at Valona," she said. "I hope it's a nice comfortable one, because they'll have to stop there a long time if they are going to wait for me."

Tony sat up suddenly in his seat. "By Jove!" he said, slowly, "we never settled that point, did we! What are you going to do about it?"

"Well, if things turn out anything like right," returned Molly cheerfully, "I shall simply tell the escort that they had better find some other way of getting me into Portriga. I don't want to be mixed up in a free fight just before I'm married." She laughed gently. "I should like to hear what Saltero says about you, Tony," she added. "He'll shove everything down to your account, you know."

Tony nodded. "I hate to treat him like this," he observed sadly, "but it really can't be helped. In a big crisis the lesser virtues always have to give way to the greater."

"You must explain that to him," said Molly, "if you ever run up against him again. It will probably console him quite a lot."

By this time the last traces of Braxa were already some distance in the rear, and the countryside had assumed that forlorn and neglected aspect which forty years of misgovernment have so successfully

impressed upon the greater part of Northern Livadia. Here and there they came across an occasional peasant woman, slouching along under a heavy burden: presumably carrying on the family business while her lord and master was assisting to make history in the Capital. With these exceptions, however, the road was absolutely deserted, a fact of which Jimmy took full advantage by pushing the car along at the utmost limit of speed which the deplorable surface would permit.

The only relief to the monotonous landscape was the long range of hills towards which they were steadily making their way. These rose sharply in the near distance against the cloudless blue sky, and somewhere amongst them, as Tony knew, lay the Château of Saint Anna and the goal of their expedition.

At last Jimmy slackened down, and looked round again from the driving seat.

"You'd better get ready for trouble," he said. "The turning's about half a mile on from here, and it's a hundred to one they'll have a patrol out at the corner."

Tony acknowledged the information with a reassuring wave of his hand; while Molly, after settling herself into a decorous attitude, opened her prayer-book at random and commenced to study "The Publick Baptism of Infants" with a deep and absorbed interest.

Jimmy proceeded forward at the same leisurely pace, until, bit by bit, the branch road that he had

spoken of crept into view, turning off to the right, and then winding its way up through the hills, like a piece of yellowish ribbon dropped down carelessly from the sky.

At the point where it joined the main road stood a straggling coppice of stunted oak trees. To the unsuspecting eye there was nothing about it to suggest the least danger; but quite suddenly, while the car was still about a hundred yards distant, the apparently peaceful prospect underwent a startling change. With the crash and swirl of breaking undergrowth, a number of uniformed figures scrambled out hastily into the sunlight, and running forward with their rifles in their hands, formed up into an irregular cordon across the roadway.

It was a well planned manœuvre, for even if the occupants of the car had wished to escape, it would have been practically impossible for them to do so. As it was Jimmy thrust on his brake and slowed down immediately into a mere crawl. Then turning round to Tony he observed with an air of respectful apology: "I'm afraid we shall have to pull up, Lord Haverstock. I expect they have got the steam-roller at work round the corner."

Before Tony could reply, a savage-looking gentleman, who appeared to be an officer, detached himself from the rest, and barked out some instruction in a hoarse and unintelligible voice, then followed by several subordinates, all gripping their rifles ready for immediate action, he strode rapidly forward towards the now stationary car.

Its three occupants awaited its approach with commendable dignity. Jimmy sat stiff and upright, still holding the steering-wheel, Tony lolled back in his seat with an air of slightly annoyed boredom, while Molly, after one incurious glance at the situation, had resumed her interrupted study of the Public Baptism of Infants.

A few yards distant, the officer, who at closer quarters looked like a rather dog's eared edition of Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, halted his men in the roadway. Then advancing by himself to the side of the car, and dropping the point of his scabbard with a menacing clink on the ground, he addressed himself to Jimmy.

As he spoke in Livadian, Tony was unable to follow what he said. From his manner, however, it was pretty easy to guess that he was demanding to know who they were and what business had brought them into the neighbourhood. It was also fairly plain that he had made up his mind not to be trifled with, and that the first sign of any attempt to escape, would be the signal for a volley of bullets from the soldiers.

Jimmy listened in silence, until the harsh string of words which were showered at his head had come to an end. Then with a significant glance at the soldiers he leaned towards his questioner, and made some low reply in the same language. It evidently had something to do with the inadvisability of treating the matter to too public a discussion, for after hesitating a moment, the officer wheeled round and ordered his

henchmen to withdraw three paces into the back-ground. Then, still looking extremely stern and suspicious, he turned back to Jimmy.

Exactly what the latter said was of course as unintelligible to Tony as the previous questions had been. It was evident, however, from the occasional introduction of such phrases as "Lord Haverstock of London," and "the Château of Saint Anna," that he was telling the story they had agreed upon in the yacht and judging by his manner he was letting off this romantic fiction with the convincing plausibility that one would expect from anybody who for several years had been intimately connected with the motor trade.

Of its effect upon the officer there could be no doubt. The threatening hostility on his face gave way gradually to an expression of surprise, not untinged with a certain dawning respect, and when he spoke again it was in an altogether different if still slightly suspicious tone.

For several minutes the dialogue continued its course, and then, breaking off suddenly, Jimmy leaned back over the seat, and addressed himself to Tony.

"This gentleman," he said, "is Major Paqueta of the King's army."

Tony inclined his head in the polite if somewhat haughty fashion of a true English nobleman—a salute which Major Paqueta acknowledged by a stiff military bow.

"He would like to have a look at the King's

letter," continued Jimmy. "I've explained the position to him, but he has orders not to allow any one to pass this corner."

With a slight air of aristocratic condescension Tony took out the document in question from his pocket and handed it to Jimmy, who in turn passed it on to the Major.

The gallant soldier unfolded it and carefully scrutinized its contents. One could see from his face that he was deeply impressed, but even so there were still distinct traces of doubt and hesitation in his manner when he looked up and again addressed himself to Jimmy.

A brief discussion followed, and then once more the latter turned round to explain.

"It's like this, Lord Haverstock. Major Paqueta believes that the letter is genuine, but his orders are very strict. He says that if we want to go on to the Château we must take him with us."

"Why, certainly," replied Tony without an instant's hesitation. "Tell Major Paqueta that I shall be delighted, and that if he wishes to return here we can give him a lift back. At least," he added drily, "I hope we shall be able to."

Jimmy passed on this communication—or at all events the first part of it—and for a second time the Major clicked his heels and genuflected stiffly. Then after a word or two of apparent explanation, he collected his three soldiers and proceeded up the road as far as the corner, followed at a dignified pace by the car. Here he handed over his command to a

bloodthirsty-looking sergeant, and having given the latter some careful instructions, clambered up into the front seat alongside of Jimmy.

Turning down the branch road the now personally conducted expedition sped along rapidly towards its goal. There was little conversation, for Jimmy was too occupied in avoiding the ruts to return anything but the briefest answers to their new friend's occasional remarks, while Molly, despite the jolting of the car, still remained buried in her baptismal studies. She looked up once at Tony, who winked at her gravely, but this familiarity only met with a chilling clerical reserve that did not encourage further advances.

About every half mile they came across small parties of soldiers, patrolling the road, all of whom drew up across their path as they approached. On each occasion, however, the sight of Major Paqueta, sitting up like a ramrod in the front seat, was sufficient to insure their undisputed passage: that obliging gentleman being evidently the senior officer in command of the district.

As the road gradually began its ascent into the hills, these patrols increased in numbers, and Tony realized that Congosta's statement about the difficulty of rushing the place by force was by no means an exaggerated one. A very small body of well-armed and determined men could indeed have held the track against an army corps, for the great rocky boulders that towered up on either hand afforded admirable cover, and offered a ready means of block-

ing up the road if such a course were rendered necessary.

At last, after about two miles of this upward progress, they came out over the crest of a long narrow gorge, and with startling abruptness the Château of Saint Anna suddenly swept into view. It stood on the summit of the next hill—a large castle-like looking building of white stone, with a number of small attendant cottages straggling down into the valley below. It was not more than a mile distant, and despite Tony's constitutional calmness a momentary thrill ran through his heart as he gazed across the short intervening space which was all that now separated him from Isabel.

CHAPTER XXIII

KIDNAPPING THE BRIDE

IN a few minutes they were mounting the steep street which appeared to be the only approach to the Château. The route was plentifully sprinkled with soldiers, and from the cottage doorways on either side women and children watched the visitors go past with open-eyed interest. The sight of Major Paqueta on the front seat seemed still to be a sufficient guarantee to everyone for their respectability; and on they went through an avenue of salutes from the soldiers, which Tony acknowledged by occasionally raising his hand with an aristocratic languor that was extremely impressive.

It was not until they reached the main entrance to the Château—a big stone archway spanned by a couple of iron gates—that any attempt was made to arrest their progress. At this point two armed sentries on guard stepped forward with raised bayonets, and not wishing to run any unnecessary risk of puncture, Jimmy at once brought the car to a standstill. Almost at the same moment a small door at the side was opened and an officer in full uniform strode out into the roadway.

He saluted Major Paqueta, and for several moments the two of them remained engaged in an animated conversation, the results of which appeared to be distinctly satisfactory. At all events, on an order from the newcomer, the two big iron gates were pushed slowly open, and with commendable care Jimmy steered his way in under the archway.

They found themselves in a large courtyard, surrounded on three sides by various portions of the Château, and decorated in the centre by the equestrian statue of a stout gentleman, brandishing a menacing sword in the direction of Heaven. Circling gracefully round this atrocity, Jimmy drew up outside the entrance to the house—a couple of big iron-studded doors, from which a flight of stone steps led down to the gravel.

With the dignity becoming to his position, Major Paqueta descended from the car. Their arrival had evidently been observed, for as he did so, one of the doors was opened from inside, and an elderly-looking steward or butler, supported by two assistants, appeared upon the threshold.

The Major stopped to make a remark or two in Livadian to Jimmy; then with another formal and apparently apologetic bow to Tony, he mounted the steps and was ushered into the house.

“He’s gone to see who’s at home,” explained Jimmy, leaning his elbow on the back of the seat. “He says he won’t keep us waiting long.”

Tony nodded. “We have done our bit,” he

observed philosophically. "It's all up to Providence now."

Molly, who had closed her prayer-book, and was sitting beside him with downcast eyes, squeezed his hand gently under the rug.

"Good luck, Tony," she said in a low voice; "just in case we don't see each other again."

Before Tony could make any response the officer who had admitted them through the gate appeared suddenly along the courtyard behind them, and took up his position on the steps within earshot of where they were sitting. Tony, of course, did not know if he understood English, but considering the somewhat delicate nature of their position it seemed advisable to avoid any unnecessary risk. He therefore contented himself by returning Molly's squeeze, and in tactful silence the three of them waited for the next development.

It was not long in arriving. Once more the big portal swung back, and Major Paqueta, with the pompous-looking steward in attendance, came down the steps and addressed a few words to Jimmy.

The latter climbed down from his seat, and without waiting for the assistance of the steward, opened the back door of the car.

"We are to go in," he announced with superb coolness. "The Count of Saint Anna is prepared to receive us."

Throwing back the rug, Tony and Molly followed him out, the latter still keeping her eyes down, and

holding the prayer-book before her in a conspicuous position.

Preceded by the steward and Major Paqueta they ascended the steps, and entered a lofty hall lit by a glass dome and set around with marble pillars. Behind these were a number of tall mahogany doors leading into the various apartments. On either side of one of them, which was open, stood the two footmen in rigid immobility, and between this expressionless pair of statues their guide conducted them into a large, handsomely furnished room, where an elderly gentleman in a frock-coat was standing by a writing-table, waiting to receive them.

The Count of Saint Anna, for it was evidently their host who faced them, bowed courteously at their entrance. He was an amiable-looking old boy with gold spectacles and a long white moustache carefully waxed at the ends. From this demeanour at all events there was no hint of any hostility or suspicion towards his visitors, and Tony felt a momentary wave of relief that since her arrival in Livadia Isabel should have been in such apparently good-natured hands.

As soon as the door was closed the Count cleared his throat and commenced to speak.

"Gentlemen," he observed in very painstaking English: "I have the pleasure to make your knowledge. Major Paqueta says that you carry a letter from His Majesty the King, and that you wish to speak with me privately on a matter of much importance."

Tony bowed, and stepping forward, again produced

the invaluable scrap of paper which had been returned to him by the Major. The old gentleman accepted it, and having adjusted his spectacles read it through with extreme care. The perusal could not really have occupied him more than a minute, but to three of those present it seemed to be the most prolonged and poignant minute ever extracted from the womb of time. At last, however, he looked up again, and with infinite relief they saw that the charm had worked.

"I will speak with these gentlemen in private," he said, addressing himself to Major Paqueta. "This is undoubtedly the writing of His Majesty."

It seemed from the Major's face as if he were slightly disappointed by this abrupt dismissal, but like a true disciplinarian he accepted the situation without remonstrance. Bowing again stiffly, he wheeled round and marched to the door and the next moment the four of them were alone.

The Count motioned his guests to be seated.

"I understand," he said, "that there is one of you gentlemen who is able to speak our language. It would be best perhaps if he should explain. I have a small knowledge of English, but it is not good to listen with."

Tony turned to Jimmy. "Go ahead, James," he said encouragingly. "Tell the Count of Saint Anna exactly what the King has asked us to do."

With that easy assurance that had won him his chequered way through the world, Jimmy set about his task. He had one of those happily constituted

natures (so frequent amongst prominent statesmen and successful men of business) which enables its possessor to become automatically more convincing the further he departs from the truth. Unintelligible as his actual words were to Tony, there was a ring of sincerity about them which filled the latter with intense admiration, and made him feel that much as he had always appreciated Jimmy, he had up till that moment failed to do him complete justice.

The Count on his part appeared to be deeply impressed. He followed Jimmy's trail of lies with the closest attention, occasionally interjecting a question, and nodding his head with grave satisfaction over the answers that were immediately forthcoming. It was an entertaining spectacle, and but for the stake at issue, and an uncomfortable sensation that every minute added to their danger, Tony would have felt quite sorry when it came to an end.

Throughout the recital Molly remained very unobtrusively in the background. She had seated herself in the darkest corner of the room, and with her eyes fixed steadily on the carpet, she appeared to be wholly absorbed in some form of inward meditation.

There was a moment's pause when Jimmy had finished, and then, with a final and decisive nod, the Count rose to his feet.

"My friends," he said in English, "you have indeed done a great service to His Majesty. You have also my own gratitude. I do not hide from

you that it has been of much distress to me that the Princess Isabella is not more happy. If to speak with this good gentleman will be of comfort to her, that is indeed all that we should wish. I will myself take him to her presence."

It was an exhilarating moment, but all three of them managed to preserve their self-control. With extreme gravity Molly got up from her seat and moved quietly in the direction of the door, Tony and Jimmy also rising and acknowledging the Count's speech with a couple of polite bows.

"In a minute I shall rejoin you," added the latter. "In the meanwhile I trust that you will regard this poor apartment as your own."

He crossed the room and opened the door politely for Molly who, still clasping her prayer-book in front of her, passed solemnly through into the hall. The Count paused for an instant on the threshold to return the salutations of his guests, and then following her out, closed the doors behind them.

Jimmy pulled out a handkerchief and softly pressed it to his forehead.

"Holy Moses!" he whispered. "If Ananias hasn't turned in his grave he's the most unjealous blighter who ever lived."

"You were wonderful, James," said Tony, with a genuine reverence in his voice. "I think we shall have to change the idea of running our garage on honest lines. It would be a sheer waste of genius."

"We needn't worry about that yet," retorted Jimmy. "We have got to get out of this hole first.

I don't know what you think, but it seems to me that our part of the business was child's play compared with that those two girls have got to tackle."

"They'll do it," replied Tony confidently. "I've the most perfect faith in Molly."

Jimmy took a deep breath. "She's great—magnificent," he said. "There isn't a woman in the world to touch her. She'll do her part all right, but it's the other one I'm thinking about. How can one expect a young girl who's no experience of acting to bring off a job like this?"

"Ah!" said Tony. "You don't know Isabel."

He walked to the writing-desk, and stood for an instant looking down at the open blotting-book.

"I wonder if the Count would mind my using his paper and envelopes," he added meditatively. "I think this would be rather a good opportunity of answering Da Freitas' letter."

"Oh, go on," said Jimmy with a chuckle. "That will be all right. He told us to look on the place as our own."

Tony seated himself at the desk, and taking out his fountain pen pulled a sheet of paper towards him. He paused to reflect for a few moments, and then dating the letter with the exact hour, began to write, slowly and deliberately.

He had not covered more than half a page, when the door opened and the Count of Saint Anna came back into the room.

"I have taken your friend in to the Princess," he said. "She was surprised, as you would expect, but I think it will make her happy to speak with him. I return to bring him back in a little while. You gentlemen will do me the honour of lunching with me, as soon as their talk is finished?"

Tony, who had got up from his chair, shook his head.

"Thank you very much, Count," he said, "but I'm afraid we shall have to start back as quick as we can. The fact is I have got an appointment with the English Ambassador. He is coming to lunch with me on my yacht."

He brought out this impromptu falsehood with such perfect readiness that even Jimmy was momentarily staggered.

"Ah!" said the Count. "I am sorry. If you could have waited it is possible that you would have had the pleasure to meet the Count de Sé. We are expecting him at any time now. He is, as you know, to take the Princess to Portriga."

"What a pity!" replied Tony regretfully. "I should love to have had a chat with him if we could have managed it." He paused. "By the way," he added, "I hope you don't mind my making free with your property like this. I was just writing a line to my friend the Marquis da Freitas. I daresay the Count de Sé would take it with him when he goes in."

The old gentleman spread out his hands in a reassuring gesture.

"Señor," he said, "please to continue. All that I have in this poor house is at your disposal."

Taking him at his word, Tony resumed his seat at the desk, while Jimmy, with some opportune remark in Livadian, promptly withdrew their host to the further side of the room.

Continuing to write with extreme deliberation, Tony finished his letter, which occupied exactly two sides of the note-paper. Then he blotted it, and sitting back in his chair, read it through carefully before folding it up.

Tuesday,
11.53 A.M.

THE CHATEAU OF SAINT ANNA,
Somewhere in Livadia.

MY DEAR MARQUIS:

It was very kind of you to write and say good-bye, as I don't suppose you had much time to spare your last day in England.

I am more than sorry that I haven't been able to look you up and thank you personally during this flying visit of ours to your beautiful and exciting country. You, I feel certain, will share this regret, but your admirable philosophy will doubtless enable you to make the best of it. Making the best of unfortunate situations is the real secret of a happy and successful life.

May I add that you can always rely on us for the most perfect discretion with regard to any secrets that we happen to share in common. I shall consider it a great kindness if you will convey to His Majesty my truest congratulations on his marriage, of which, under the circumstances, I feel quite sure you will thoroughly approve.

Wishing you the best of success in your patriotic efforts on behalf of Livadia,

I am, my dear Marquis,

Your sincere admirer,

ANTONY CONWAY.

P. S. You were quite right about the proverb.
Ha! Ha!

Having enclosed this in an envelope and addressed it, Tony got up from his chair and handed it to the Count.

"I shall be much obliged if you will give that to De Sé," he said. "I want the Marquis to get it as soon as possible and I expect your postal arrangements are a bit disorganized."

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"All is confusion for the moment," he admitted, "but I trust that by Monday we may hope for better things. So soon as the King is married there will be no more fighting."

He put the letter away carefully in his inside pocket, and for a few minutes continued to discourse on the revolution and its possible developments. It was quite evident that he shared Colonel Saltero's opinion as to the immediate effect of the coming ceremony, and that he looked forward to the future with a complete and touching confidence.

At last, again adjusting his spectacles, which had a habit of slipping down his nose, he glanced up at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"I think," he said "that I might now return to

the Princess. It was, I understand, for twenty minutes that your good friend wished to speak with her."

"Perhaps it would be as well," said Tony reluctantly. "I hate to rush away like this, but we really ought to get back as soon as possible. I don't want to keep the Ambassador waiting."

They moved together towards the door, and as Tony opened it he added: "I should like to take the chance of having a look at your hall pillars if I may. I never saw finer marble in my life."

A gratified smile lit up the Count's features.

"It is considered a not unfavourable example of our architecture," he said. "I am honoured that it should meet with your approval."

He conducted them outside, and after again apologizing for leaving them, mounted the broad staircase and disappeared from view along the gallery above.

For a moment Tony and Jimmy remained standing where they were, apparently lost in admiration. One glance round, however, had shown both of them all that they really wished to see. Through the partly open front door they had caught a glimpse of Major Paqueta and the other officer engaged in conversation on the steps, while a faint but clearly audible ticking below told them that the faithful car was still in the same position where they had left it.

"We might be able to manage it," whispered Jimmy; "even if there's a hitch at the last moment."

"There'll be no hitch," replied Tony gently.

“Put your trust in Providence, Jimmy, and admire the hall.”

He strolled placidly round from pillar to pillar, examining the carving at the base of each, and occasionally patting one with his hand, as if to express his approbation. Jimmy accompanied him, sauntering along with equal nonchalance, and puffing at a cigarette which he had lighted while talking to the Count.

They were just completing the circuit and were within a few feet of the door, when a sudden sound above brought them to a halt. They both looked up, and as they did so two people appeared at the head of the staircase.

One was the Count, coming down with his hand on the banisters, and talking away affably in his indifferent English.

The other——

Standing where he was, Tony stared up at the slim black-coated figure, that with prayer-book in hand and lowered eyes was descending the staircase alongside of their host. The likeness to Molly as he had last seen her was so amazing that for just one numbing instant a horrible fear that she had failed gripped him by the heart.

Then—somehow or other—he knew—knew beyond any shadow of doubt that it was Isabel herself. All his coolness returned to him instantly, and drawing in a deep, delicious breath he stepped forward to meet them.

“His Majesty will be very grateful to you,” said the

Count in a low voice. "I am happy to say that the kindness and sympathy of this good gentleman have been of much comfort to the Princess. She is like a different person."

"I have no doubt she is," replied Tony heartily. "I know from experience that a talk with Mr. Monk always makes one feel better and happier." He held out his hand. "Good-bye, Count," he added, "and thank you again so much for your kindness."

The Count shook hands warmly with all three of them.

"It has been a privilege to make your friendship," he replied. "But I will not say 'good-bye.' It is possible, I hope, that you will be returning here before long."

"It is," admitted Tony, "distinctly."

"And when you come," continued their host, shaking his finger playfully, "I shall not permit you to leave us a second time in so great a hurry."

Tony smiled, and again wrung his hand. "I am sure of that, Count," he said; "quite sure of it."

They walked to the doors, which had been thrown back by the steward, who had suddenly reappeared upon the scene, and passed out once more into the sunshine and freedom of the open air.

Isabel did not waste any time. Without looking to the right or left, she stepped up quietly into the tonneau, and getting in after her Tony settled himself between her and the steps. With almost equal promptness Jimmy and the Major took their places

in front. There was a farewell wave from the Count and the other officer, a sputtering of gravel as the wheels commenced to revolve, and the next moment the car was circling again round the stout gentleman with the sword, and heading gaily towards the archway.

Tony's sensations, as he found himself once more slipping past the open cottage doors, were so radiantly exhilarating that it was all he could do to keep them under control. Indeed, but for the fact that his right hand was clasping Isabel's left under the rug, and that the other was temporarily occupied in returning the salutes of the soldiers by the roadside, he felt that the temptation to throw his arms round Major Paqueta's neck would have been utterly irresistible.

The necessity for silence—always a difficult virtue in his case—did not tend to make the struggle any easier. A dozen questions were trembling on his tongue, but apart from the fact that Jimmy was driving at a pace which would have rendered anything but shouting absolutely useless, he knew it would be stark madness for Isabel to begin talking until they had succeeded in ridding themselves of their passenger. So with splendid if painful self-control he sat mutely beside her, while steadily gathering speed, the car swept up the opposite hillside and plunged joyously out of sight of the Château into the narrow gorge above.

With the exception of slowing down occasionally as he passed the various patrols, Jimmy pushed along

in such an animated fashion that in what seemed to be an amazingly short time they had again descended from the high ground, and were racing back along the winding valley which led into the main road. As they came in sight of the thicket where they had first had the privilege of making Major Paqueta's acquaintance, two or three of the latter's soldiers, who were evidently on the watch, came hurrying out from amongst the trees. Seeing that it was their leader returning they formed up promptly into some kind of order, and putting on his brakes, Jimmy brought the car to a halt a dozen paces or so from where they were standing.

With a few words, apparently expressive of his thanks, the Major climbed down into the roadway. Then, drawing himself up, he bowed twice—once to Tony and once to Isabel: a polite attention which they both returned as gracefully as their somewhat cramped circumstances would allow. At the same moment Jimmy thrust in his clutch, and lurching forward again, the car swung rapidly round the corner on to the main Braxa road.

A few hundred yards from the wood Tony's self-control was unable to hold out any longer. Throwing back the rug he lifted up Isabel's hand, and regardless as to whether any one could see him or not, pressed it recklessly and joyously to his lips.

With a little gasp she laid her other hand upon his sleeve.

"Oh, say it's true, Tony. Tell me it's really true!"

Her words were almost carried away by the wind,

for sublimely indifferent to the ruts Jimmy had let the car out to its fullest extent, and they were racing and bounding along in a fashion which would have done credit to a high-spirited chamois.

With a glad laugh Tony put his arm round her and drew her close up against him.

"It's the truest thing that's ever happened," he answered. "You are mine now, Isabel—mine, mine, mine; and all the fat-headed Kings in Europe will never get you away from me again."

Satisfied apparently with what she could hear of his statement, Isabel made no attempt to reply. With her eyes half-closed she leaned against his shoulder, swaying with the movement of the car and holding tight to his hand like a tired but contented child.

"Were you going to marry him?" demanded Tony abruptly, as a worse bit of road than usual caused a momentary slackening in the pace.

She opened her eyes and nodded. "Uncle Philip told me that they had got hold of you too, and that if I didn't do it they would punish you horribly, somehow or other. I meant to kill myself directly I knew you were safe."

The arm with which Tony was holding her tightened a little in its grip.

"If ever I meet Uncle Phil again," he remarked slowly, "he'll run up against something considerably harder than Richmond Park."

A fresh plunge forward on the part of the car rendered any further conversation temporarily im-

possible, and for the next quarter of an hour they spun along in the same buoyant fashion, while the red roofs of Braxa, which were now visible in the distance, grew plainer and plainer every minute.

Some way short of the straggling outskirts Jimmy again checked his speed, and pulling into the side of the road came to a sudden and unexpected halt.

"How d'you do, Isabel," he observed, looking round over his shoulder. "Glad to meet you." Then addressing himself to her companion, he added: "What's your notion about things, Tony? I think myself we'd better make a dash for it. Run slap through the town and straight down on to the landing stage. I suppose the boat will be there all right."

Tony nodded. "One can always depend upon Guy," he said. "But how about the car? What are you going to do with that?"

"Scrap it," replied Jimmy. "Leave it on the quay. It doesn't belong to me you know, it belongs to the garage. I've got all my earthly possessions in my pocket."

"Right away then," said Tony, "and don't stop for anything." He turned to Isabel. "You won't be frightened if we have to run over a few policemen," he said. "It's just possible they may be on the lookout for us."

Isabel shook her head. "I don't mind," she said firmly. "Not in the least."

"Well, look out for squalls," remarked Jimmy cheerfully. "It's neck or nothing now."

He pulled his Homburg hat on tighter and started

off again down the road, which stretched out ahead of them bare and dusty in the blazing midday sunshine.

Peaceful as Braxa had seemed when they had passed through it earlier in the morning, it was at this hour even more deserted than before. The heat of the sun seemed to have driven such people as were about into the shelter of the wine shops, and except for a few unhappy-looking dogs, rummaging amongst the garbage, a deep, languorous tranquillity brooded over everything.

They raced up the main street at a pace which sent the dust flying in clouds on either side of them; and without sounding their horn or otherwise announcing their approach, they swept round the corner into the big open space where they had had their previous encounter with the policeman. They were half-way across, and were heading straight for the track that led down on to the beach, when the drowsy silence of the square was suddenly disturbed by a hoarse shout on the left. Tony glanced round in the direction of the sound, and was rewarded by the sight of two uniformed figures hurrying out from the shadow of the trees, and running and stumbling towards them with loud and peremptory cries.

"You're too late," he observed placidly. "Go on, Jimmy."

As he spoke the car shot up the slight incline which hitherto shut out the beach from view and at the same moment a half stifled exclamation broke simultaneously from all three of its occupants. Right

across the track, in such a position as to shut out any possibility of passing it, stood a big clumsy ox-cart, half full of sand. Some yards further on they could see the driver chatting affably to a couple of fishermen, but even if he had wished to help them, he was too far away to be of any use.

Under the circumstances Jimmy did the only thing that could possibly have saved them. Thrusting out his clutch, he flung the wheel hard over to the right, and with a wild swirl the car left the track, and plunging forward into the soft sand at the side, came to a staggeringly abrupt standstill.

Despite the shock, Tony had opened the door and was out on the beach almost before the wheels had ceased to revolve.

"Come along," he said coolly; "plenty of time."

But for one fact, it is probable that his statement would have proved true. This fact unfortunately just made all the difference. The sudden stoppage had flung Jimmy forward with such force against the steering-wheel that all the breath had been knocked clean out of his body, and for the moment he was as completely helpless as any human being could possibly be.

Seeing what had happened, Tony darted round to the other side of the car, and catching him in his arms, lifted him bodily out of the seat. Even while he was doing so, the first paralysing effects of the blow began to wear off; but the delay—brief as it had been—was quite long enough to bring about disaster.

Already the pursuing policemen had come racing up over the rise behind, and were bawling out frantic instructions to the driver of the cart and the two fishermen who were with him. Thunderstruck as the latter seemed to be, they yet retained sufficient intelligence to grasp the fact that they were being called upon to assist the law. For a second only they hesitated; then with a simultaneous movement, they lumbered forward up the beach, and true to the voice of duty, rushed in upon their quarry.

The next minute was probably the busiest in Tony's life. Letting go of Jimmy, he sprang forward to meet the first of their assailants—a big black-bearded fellow, who had slightly out-distanced the others. The man dived for his body, but swinging up his left with a terrific jolt Tony caught him full in the face, and sent him sprawling over on the sand. Then, just in the nick of time, he turned to meet the driver of the cart. There was no chance of repeating his former tactics, for the sheer weight of the latter's rush had brought him into close quarters, and the next instant they were swaying up and down, clutched in each other's arms.

At any ordinary time they would have been a very well matched pair, but the desperation of the moment had filled Tony with a kind of wild madness that seemed almost to have doubled his strength. Wrenching his right arm free he drove his fist deep into his opponent's midriff with the force of a piston-rod. The man's legs shut up under him like a clasp-

knife—down he went in a gurgling heap, dragging Tony with him in his fall.

The latter was up again almost immediately, but his first glance round showed him the hopelessness of the situation. Racing down the slope with all possible speed, the two policemen had already reached the scene of action. One of them was rushing towards him with a drawn sword, and yelling to him to surrender, while the other was dodging round the car in pursuit of Isabel.

At that moment, just when everything seemed to be lost, a violent “bang” from behind burst suddenly on Tony’s ear. He spun round instinctively—and there, fifteen yards away, was the Heaven-sent figure of “Tiger” Bugg, leaping up the beach with the speed and fury of an avenging angel. A few paces in the rear stood Guy Oliver, hatless, perspiring, and with a smoking revolver levelled in his hand.

Even as Tony turned there came a second spurt of flame. He felt the bullet whistle past him, and almost simultaneously an agonized yelp of pain showed that it had found its mark. He swung round again instantly, just in time to see the onrushing policeman drop his sword, and stagger back a couple of paces with his left hand clasped to his shoulder.

Disregarding everything else Tony flung himself to the rescue of Isabel. At the sound of the second shot, the man who was chasing her had pulled up abruptly in his tracks, apparently debating whether, under the new circumstances, discretion was not the better part of valour. Before he could make up his

mind Tony was on him. He flung up his arms to defend himself, but a smashing left in the throat toppled him over like a pole-axed bullock, the back of his head coming in violent contact with the radiator, and thus completing his discomfiture.

Panting, and quite unable to speak, Isabel leaned against the side of the car.

"It's all over," said Tony cheerfully, and slipping his arm gently round her, he bent down and kissed her. "I'll carry you to the boat," he added.

She made some inaudible protest, but without paying any attention he picked her up in his arms and turned towards the quay.

It was a stricken field that met his gaze, but all danger was apparently over. With Bugg's assistance Jimmy was just struggling to his feet, while his late assailant, stretched out full length on the sand beside him, seemed to have given up any further interest in the proceedings. On the right, still clutching his revolver, Guy stood on guard over the remainder of the enemies, none of them, however, appeared to be in any condition to interfere.

He glanced up with a white and eager face as Tony strode forward, carrying Isabel in his arms.

"Is she all right?" he gasped breathlessly.

Tony gave him a reassuring nod. "We are both in the best of health, thank you, Guy," he said. "How about the boat?"

Guy took a deep breath. "You'll find the boat there," he said, pointing towards the jetty. "Get

on board as quick as you can. Bugg and I will bring Dale along."

Without further remark, Tony hurried on down the beach, and passed in between the two wooden posts which marked the entrance to the rough stone causeway. A few yards ahead of him stood the Captain of the *Betty* holding the gig's painter in his hand. In the boat below a couple of sailors were ready at their oars.

"Hello, skipper!" exclaimed Tony. "How nice of you to have come yourself! I hope we haven't kept you waiting."

As he spoke he gently lowered Isabel to her feet, and supporting her with one hand, held out the other to Captain Simmons.

The sailor gripped it in his huge brown paw.

"Thank God, you're safe, Sir Antony," he exclaimed heartily. "I'd have given anything to be able to lend a hand, but I didn't dare leave the boat. We'd have been done if they'd cut us off."

"Oh, we didn't want any more help," said Tony laughing. "The whole beach is littered with corpses as it is." He paused. "Let me introduce you to Miss Francis," he ended, "the lady I'm going to marry."

For a moment the skipper stared at Isabel in dumb amazement: then with that readiness in emergency which always distinguishes the British sailor, he took off his cap and made her an abrupt bow.

"Pleased to meet you, Miss," he remarked huskily.

At that instant through the entrance to the jetty

appeared the dishevelled figure of Jimmy limping cheerfully along between Guy and Bugg.

"Here come the others," said Tony. "We'd better get aboard before there's any more trouble." He dropped down into the boat, and steadied himself in the stern. "You pass Miss Francis down to me, will you, skipper?"

Like a man in a dream, but with the most respectful and solicitous care Captain Simmons lifted up Isabel and lowered her gently into Tony's arms. As her feet touched the planks Bugg, Guy, and Jimmy appeared on the causeway above, and the next moment they too were scrambling hastily down into their places. Captain Simmons followed with the painter.

"Let her go," he exclaimed curtly.

The two sailors swung back together, and with a steady gliding motion the boat drew away from the strenuous shores of Livadia into the blue waters of the sunlit bay.

CHAPTER XXIV

MAKING SURE OF ISABEL

FOR the second time that morning Lady Jocelyn opened the *Daily Mail* and adjusting her glasses bent over the centre column with its staring and heavily leaded headlines.

AMAZING DEVELOPMENT IN LIVADIA

KING PEDRO MARRIED TO THE PRINCESS ISABELLA

THE CIVIL WAR ENDED

In Saturday's issue we were able to give our readers the exclusive information that King Pedro and the ex-prime minister of Livadia, the Marquis da Freitas, had landed in Portriga.

Our well informed special correspondent, who transmitted the news, hinted also that within a short time we might expect to hear of some dramatic developments in the situation. The correctness of his forecast has been amply demonstrated in a further and lengthy message received late last night; a message which conveys the striking information that King Pedro and his rival claimant to the throne, the beautiful daughter of the late Don

Francisco, were married on Sunday morning in the Cathedral at Portriga.

The situation from the political point of view is dealt with fully in our leading article. We feel certain, however, that all readers of the *Daily Mail* will join in congratulating the Royal and happy pair upon their romantic union.

During his residence amongst us King Pedro has given many proofs of the manly and democratic spirit by which he is animated, and we share our correspondent's hope that under his rule and that of his fair and youthful consort, our old established allies—the Livadian people—will enter upon a long era of peace and prosperity.

From our Special Correspondent.

PORTRIGA, Sunday night.

Today has been the most dramatic day in the whole history of Livadia. Within an hour of my sending off my last message (since when I have been unable to communicate) a number of posters and bills began to make their appearance all over the town, announcing that on Sunday morning King Pedro would be married to the Princess Isabella, the beautiful and rather mysterious daughter of the late Pretender, of whose whereabouts very few even of her own supporters seemed to have any definite knowledge.

With great difficulty, and only through the kind assistance of Mr. Watson the British Consul, I managed to obtain an interview with General Almaida. The latter, who appeared to be in a state of considerable agitation, declared the report to be a deliberate canard set about by the King's supporters.

Further inquiries, however, led me to the conclusion that the Princess was actually in the hands of the Royalists, and that having been won over by the King's courtesy and charm of manner, she had agreed to the marriage as the natural and happy solution of their rival claims. The truth of this view was soon demonstrated.

At an early hour on Sunday morning, all the foreign correspondents in Portriga received an official invitation to the Cathedral, the approaches to which were held in considerable force by the King's troops. The ceremony, which was originally announced for twelve o'clock, did not take place until nearly one-thirty, owing I believe to a final attempt on the part of General Almada to break through into the centre of the town. His belated effort was easily frustrated, as a large number of his followers had already laid down their arms, recognizing the hopelessness of their position.

The marriage rites, which were performed by the aged Bishop of Portriga, were carried through with considerable state. Except for a momentary interruption half through the service, the authors of which were promptly arrested and conveyed from the Cathedral, the ceremony proceeded along its course without any untoward incident. On leaving the building the Royal Pair were greeted with the utmost enthusiasm by a large and apparently well contented crowd and drove in state to the ancient palace of St. Peter, where from time immemorial the ruling house of Livadia have been accustomed to reside.

The new Queen of Livadia is a young girl of remarkable beauty—not unlike an Englishwoman in appearance. She has a wealth of that wonderful auburn hair, which is frequently to be met with in the Southern provinces of Livadia, and throughout the ceremony she conducted

herself with a grace and dignity that won the admiration of all beholders.

It is not difficult to believe that under its young and happily endowed rulers, who will be guided by that experienced statesman the Marquis da Freitas, the country will soon recover from the troublous times through which it has been recently passing.

Having read so far, Lady Jocelyn laid down the paper, and leaned back against the sofa. For a minute or so she remained there motionless, gazing straight out in front of her with an expression such as few people had ever seen upon her naturally shrewd and cheerful face.

At last, with a faint sigh, she picked up the paper again, and stared once more at the blatant headlines.

"Oh, my poor Tony," she said softly to herself. "My poor dear boy!"

The words had hardly left her lips when the noise of a motor pulling up outside came in plainly through the open window. A moment later the front door bell pealed loudly.

Lady Jocelyn got up, and walking slowly to the door intercepted the maid who was in the act of crossing the landing.

"I am not at home, Ellen," she said, "unless it's Mr. Henry Conway. I am expecting him, so you can bring him straight upstairs."

"Yes, M'lady," murmured the girl sympathetically.

All Lady Jocelyn's servants adored her, and

although to them Isabel's abrupt disappearance was still a complete mystery, they were very troubled and upset at the obvious effect which it had produced upon their mistress.

Walking back across the room Lady Jocelyn had just reached her former seat, when a sudden sound of voices in the hall below made her pause abruptly. An exclamation escaped from her lips, and with an unconscious movement she stretched out her arm and caught hold of the back of the sofa to steady herself. The next moment footsteps came scrambling up the stairs, and forgetful of all her professional training, Ellen burst wildly into the room, her round face shining with excitement.

"Oh, M'lady! It's Miss Isabel and Sir Antony, M'lady—and—and Mr. Oliver."

Even as she spoke the first-named couple appeared in the doorway, and with a little glad cry, Lady Jocelyn stepped forward, holding out her hands.

"Tony! Isabel!" she whispered; then as they hurried towards her, and each threw their arms round her, she added, half laughing, half crying: "Oh, you dear, bad children! How you've frightened me!"

In the middle of their embrace, Guy Oliver followed them into the room. With the exception of a slight trace of sunburn he looked as sedate and respectable as ever; indeed the thought of him standing on a blood-stained beach blazing away with a revolver seemed like the wildest fancy of an imaginative dipsomaniac.

"We only landed at Southampton early this morning," explained Tony penitently; "and I couldn't spoil things by telegraphing."

At this point Ellen, who had been standing contemplating the scene with the frankest curiosity, suddenly woke up to a realization of her professional lapse. With a reluctant sigh she withdrew noiselessly from the room, closing the door behind her, and dashed off downstairs to communicate the exciting tidings to her fellow-servants.

With their arms round Lady Jocelyn, Tony and Isabel conducted her gently to the sofa, and seated themselves one on each side of her. Guy took his place in an armchair facing them.

"You must forgive me, Guy," said Lady Jocelyn. "I am so happy and excited I haven't even said how do you do, and I'm sure it's all through you that I have got my mad children back alive and well."

"Of course it is," exclaimed Tony. "If Guy hadn't waded in and slaughtered half the Livadian police force on the beach, we shouldn't have had a dog's chance of getting clear. Isn't that so, Isabel?"

Isabel nodded. "He was very brave," she said gratefully. "I shall never forget how fierce and splendid he looked."

Poor Guy's face turned a vivid crimson.

"I wish I had seen him," remarked Lady Jocelyn, with considerable regret in her voice; "but it seems to me we are beginning at the wrong end." She stooped forward and picked up the *Daily Mail*, which had fallen to the floor. "Look at that," she

added, pointing to the headlines, "and for pity's sake tell me what it all means."

"I've seen it," said Tony. "It means that even Lord Northcliffe may be deceived at times." He paused. "I didn't tell you quite everything before we started, Aunt Fanny. I had some silly idea it might worry you."

"Never mind," said Lady Jocelyn generously. "If you will make up for it now, I think I might manage to forgive you."

She took Isabel's slim hand in hers and leaned back against the sofa.

"I'll try," said Tony gravely; "but Guy and Isabel will have to help. It's the sort of story that requires at least three strong people, if one wants to tell it properly."

The incompleteness of his previous confidences had of course lain in the fact that hitherto he had omitted all mention of the leading rôle played by Molly during the latter stages of the proceedings. Going back now to the point at which she had first told him of her secret marriage to Pedro, he described in full detail how the main idea of a possible rescue had originated with her, and the daring and skilful manner in which she had thrown herself into the scheme.

He gave a rapid account of their run down through the night to Southampton, and of how—thanks to McEwen—they had managed to reach Portriga in a time for which the nominal horse-power of the *Betty's* engines failed to convey any adequate explanation.

Then, after describing the respective arrivals on board of Jimmy and Colonel Saltero, he went on to explain how they had all come to a unanimous decision that in a raid on the Château of Saint Anna lay their only possible chance of success. With an account of that immortal drive and of their experiences in the Château he at length brought the story down to the moment when Molly and the Count had retired upstairs to administer spiritual consolation to the Princess Isabella.

At this point he paused.

"I think that's about my share," he observed unselfishly. "You go on now, Isabel; tell Aunt Fanny the rest of it."

Lady Jocelyn, who had been listening to him with an expression of entranced interest, sat upright in her seat, still holding Isabel's hand.

"What an amazing and delightful person this Molly Monk must be!" she exclaimed. "And to think that she is the granddaughter of old Monk at the Lodge! I always said there was something extraordinarily bracing in the Helbeck air."

"I think she must be the bravest and cleverest girl that ever lived," said Isabel with shining eyes. "You know I hadn't the faintest suspicion that she wasn't a real clergyman until the Count had gone out of the room. You can't imagine what I felt like when she suddenly bolted the door and began to talk to me. I was so astonished at first that I don't believe I could have done anything by myself, but she was as cool and quiet about it all as if it was just

the most ordinary thing in the world. All the time she was talking she was making me change clothes with her, and by the time we had got into each other's things I didn't feel frightened or stupid any longer.

"Then, while she was doing up my hair and putting on my wig, she began to ask me questions—whether I spoke to the Count in English (which I always had done)—how I behaved as a rule when he came into the room—and, and other things of that sort. I tried to answer as well as I could, and you can't think how quick and clever she was at understanding. She made me walk about and sit down and talk to her, and by the time she had finished dressing herself and had done her hair like mine, she was able to imitate me so exactly that I could hardly believe it was real.

"We were expecting the Count back every minute then; so she unbolted the door and told me as quickly as possible what I was to do when he came. She said that whatever happened I was not to answer him if he spoke to me, but only to nod or shake my head, and leave everything else to her.

"Then we heard him on the stairs, and she sat down quite quietly in the chair I generally used, and made me stand just beside her with my back to the door."

Isabel paused, as if the memory of that rather tense experience still lingered poignantly in her mind.

"I'd have given a thousand pounds to be there," observed Tony regretfully. "It must have been the best moment of the whole show."

"I wouldn't go through it again for anything in the world," declared Isabel with a reminiscent shiver. "It was like standing on the edge of some horrible precipice waiting to be pushed over." She paused again. "I can't tell you exactly what happened," she went on. "I suppose I was too excited to take it in properly. I know that he spoke to me first, and that Molly interrupted him and said something about feeling a great deal happier and not minding so much now that she was going to be married. I remember that she held her handkerchief up to her eyes as if she had been crying, and that the Count seemed very pleased and satisfied and patted her on the shoulder.

"Then almost before I knew what was happening we were walking down the stairs together. I heard him talking, but I don't know the least what he said, because when we got to the head of the banisters I suddenly caught sight of Tony and Mr. Dale standing in the hall, and somehow that put everything else out of my head. It was all I could do to stop giving a shout and rushing down to them."

"Well, you didn't show any sign of it," said Tony. "I never saw a more dignified descent in my life."

"I am sure I should have dropped dead from sheer excitement," remarked Lady Jocelyn sympathetically. "It's marvellous what sound nerves you've got, Isabel; considering the shocking way your father used to drink."

"It all happened so quickly," said Isabel, "I simply didn't have time to do anything silly. I

just got straight into the car, and in another minute we were rushing away down the hill, and nothing in the whole world seemed to matter then."

"And how about the drive back and the battle on the beach?" inquired Lady Jocelyn. "Come along, Tony, I insist upon knowing everything."

"Oh, the first part was very simple," said Tony. "We dropped dear old Paqueta at the point where we picked him up, and I think he was quite sorry to say good-bye to us. Then we jogged along comfortably till we came to Portriga. Of course we were on the lookout for trouble there, because of the row we had had with the policeman in the morning. Nothing happened, however, until we were just reaching the beach, and then two savage looking gentlemen jumped out at us in the most unfriendly way. We should have been quite all right, only as luck would have it there was a big cart drawn right across the track that ran down to the jetty. We couldn't pass it, so we had to pull up and get out. After that—" he broke off with a smile, "well, you had better ask Guy to tell you the rest," he finished. "He's so saturated with blood and slaughter that he will be able to do justice to it."

"Go on, Guy," said Lady Jocelyn. "Don't mind my feelings."

"He is talking the most absolute nonsense," exclaimed Guy indignantly. "Bugg and I were waiting on the quay—we had come ashore with the Captain to fetch him—and of course when we saw them being attacked we naturally came to their help.

Tony had already knocked down about three people, so there was practically nothing left for us to do. I am afraid I did shoot one of the policemen with a revolver that I happened to have with me, but I am thankful to say that he was only wounded in the shoulder."

"He's ashamed of himself," said Tony mercilessly; "that's what's the matter. Why he came up the beach like a roaring tiger, and if it hadn't——"

There was a knock at the door, and almost simultaneously Ellen presented herself on the threshold.

"If you please, M'lady, Mr. Henry Conway has called."

"Henry!" repeated Tony; "what a joke. It just needed Henry to make the party perfect."

Lady Jocelyn looked round her with an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed. "I quite forgot to tell you I was expecting him. He rang up early this morning and left a message that he was coming round. I think he wants to know where you are, Tony."

"I am not quite sure myself yet," said Tony; "but I shall be delighted to give him all the information I have." He got up from the sofa. "Besides," he added, "it will be a good opportunity to introduce him to Isabel."

"Are you serious?" demanded Guy. "Do you really mean you want to see him?"

"Certainly I do," replied Tony. "I think people ought to meet their new relations as soon as possible."

"Very well," said Lady Jocelyn. "Show him up, Ellen." Then she turned to Tony. "Are you going to tell him everything?"

"Of course not," said Tony. "We must keep Isabel's past an absolute secret between ourselves. I have given my word to Da Freitas about that."

"But you know what Henry is," objected Guy. "He is sure to ask all sorts of questions right away."

"Well, if he does," said Tony "we must give him an evasive answer—like the sailor."

Before Guy had recovered from this reply, footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and the next moment Henry was ushered into the room.

As he caught sight of its occupants he paused dramatically on the threshold; his naturally stolid face expanding into an expression of the utmost surprise.

"You here!" he exclaimed, addressing himself to Tony. "Why I have been hunting London for you the last twenty-four hours."

"I hope you had good sport," said Tony.

"I wish you wouldn't disappear like that and not leave any address behind," proceeded Henry in an aggrieved voice, "I had some very important business I wished to see you about."

"I am so sorry," replied Tony; "but as a matter of fact I had some very important business too." He took Isabel's hand, and assisted her up from the sofa. "I have been getting engaged to be married."

For a moment Henry stared at him in dumb amazement.

"Is—is this a fact?" he stammered.

"I should think it was," replied Tony cheerfully. "Let me introduce you to Isabel. This is Cousin Henry, Isabel. I'm sure you'll get along together splendidly."

By a tremendous effort Henry managed to pull himself together.

"You must forgive me," he said with a quite creditable bow to Isabel. "Tony took me so completely by surprise I scarcely knew what I was saying." He turned to Lady Jocelyn and Guy. "Why have I heard nothing about this?" he demanded.

"We only heard about it ourselves ten minutes ago," replied Lady Jocelyn soothingly. "Tony always does things in that sort of way, you know."

Henry's eyes travelled back to Isabel, and rested on her with admiration—not, however, untinged by a certain trace of doubt.

"You must forgive me," he said again, "but at present I haven't even the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Isabel," repeated Tony, "Isabel Francis. It's a nice name, isn't it?"

To this inquiry Henry returned no answer.

"Are you any relation of Sir George Francis of Laurence Weston?" he asked.

Isabel shook her head. "I don't think so," she replied simply.

"As a matter of fact," said Tony, "Isabel has no relations at all. That's one of her chief charms."

"No relations at all!" exclaimed Henry in an aghast and incredulous voice.

"Not one," said Tony firmly. "But you needn't worry about that, Henry. Our engagement has the warm approval of both Aunt Fanny and Guy."

"That's quite right," said Lady Jocelyn, nodding her head. "I think Tony is a great deal luckier than he deserves."

Henry turned to Guy. "And you too?" he demanded.

Guy rose manfully to the occasion.

"If I was in Tony's place," he declared, "I should be the proudest and happiest man in the world."

With the air of one who has been unexpectedly torpedoed Henry abandoned the unequal contest.

"In that case," he observed in a slightly dazed tone, "I can only offer you both my sincere congratulations."

"I knew you would be pleased," said Tony. "You always wanted me to get married, didn't you?"

"I hope," continued Henry, addressing himself to Isabel, "that before long we may have the pleasure of becoming better acquainted. Unfortunately I can't stay now, because I have an important political appointment at half-past twelve."

"What a pity," remarked Lady Jocelyn. "I was just going to suggest that you should stay and lunch with us."

"It's very kind of you," said Henry; "but I'm afraid my presence at the House is indispensable." He turned back to Tony. "You must bring Miss

Francis round to see us as soon as possible," he added, "this afternoon if you can. I know that Laura will be intensely anxious to meet her."

"I am sure of that," said Tony. "We are a bit full up, but we'll come along if we can. Anyhow, you will be able to let Laura know what a charming girl Isabel is."

He smiled cheerfully at his cousin, and the latter, whose faculties still seemed to be suffering a little from the shock that they had received, shook hands all round and withdrew from the room.

"I think he took it splendidly," said Tony, as soon as the door was closed. "There's lots of grit in the Conway family when it comes to the point."

"Are you really going round there this afternoon?" inquired Guy.

Tony shook his head. "I am afraid we sha'n't have time," he said. "I have to go and get a special license and I believe it's a most exhausting business."

"A special license!" exclaimed Lady Jocelyn. "Do you mean you are going to be married at once?"

"Of course we are," said Tony. "I am not going to run any more risk of losing Isabel. Once we are married she will be quite safe whatever happens. They can't have her back then without making me King of Livadia, and I think that even Congosta would draw the line at that."

"It's the best plan, Aunt Fanny," put in Guy quietly. "We talked it all over on the boat coming back. This man Congosta is still in London, and if

he was to come across Tony and Isabel it might lead to all sorts of trouble. The safest thing is for them to get married and go away at once on the *Betty*. Congosta will probably return to Livadia before long, but meanwhile it's absolutely essential that they should both keep out of the way."

"I suppose it is," admitted Lady Jocelyn. "From what you have told me I should imagine he would be a very unpleasant person to have hanging about while one was trying to enjoy a honeymoon." She got up from the sofa. "You haven't half finished the story yet," she added. "I want to know all sorts of things—how you propose to account for Molly's sudden disappearance from the Gaiety, and what's happened to that nice friend of yours who provided you with the car. He seems to be a remarkably amiable and obliging young man, but I am afraid he must have rather damaged his prospects of making a comfortable living in Livadia."

"Jimmy's all right," said Tony. "He came back with us, and we are going to start a shop together in Piccadilly. As for Molly—well, I don't think we shall have any real trouble there. She has no relations who are likely to make a fuss, and we have fixed up a good sound lie for the theatre that ought to keep them quiet."

"You shall tell me about it when I come back," said Lady Jocelyn. "I must go downstairs first and talk to the cook, or else we sha'n't have enough to eat for lunch. You are all going to stay of course."

"I'm afraid I can't," replied Guy, shaking his

head. "I must get back to Hampstead as soon as possible. There are a lot of things to see to before Tony goes away."

"If you are thinking of giving us a wedding present," said Tony, "we should like the revolver with which you murdered the policeman."

"Come along, Guy," said Lady Jocelyn, taking his arm. "They are an ungrateful pair of children, and we will leave them to their fate."

"I wish I was really rich," said Tony, as the door closed. "I should like to buy Long Acre and put a high wall round it, and never let any one go into it except ourselves." He took Isabel's hands and drew her gently towards him. "I can't think of anything else," he added, "that isn't absolutely and splendidly perfect."

"Only about Molly," answered Isabel, looking up at him with rather troubled eyes. "Oh, Tony, you do think she's safe and happy, don't you?"

"I am sure of it," said Tony confidently. "They can never go back on what they have done, and in about two months Molly will have the whole place under her thumb. If any one's going to be unhappy it will be Da Freitas and the Count de Sé."

"Oh, I do hope so," said Isabel feelingly. Then she paused, and took a long breath. "She will make a wonderful queen, Tony. She will be as good at it as I should have been bad."

"You were meant for something much nicer than that," said Tony.

He drew her down into his arms, and bending forward pressed a long and passionate kiss upon her soft and slightly parted lips.

"I love kissing you, Isabel," he remarked. "You always taste of crushed violets."

"Do I?" said Isabel dreamily. "I'm so glad, Tony."

"So am I," said Tony; and with some deliberation he kissed her again.

THE END

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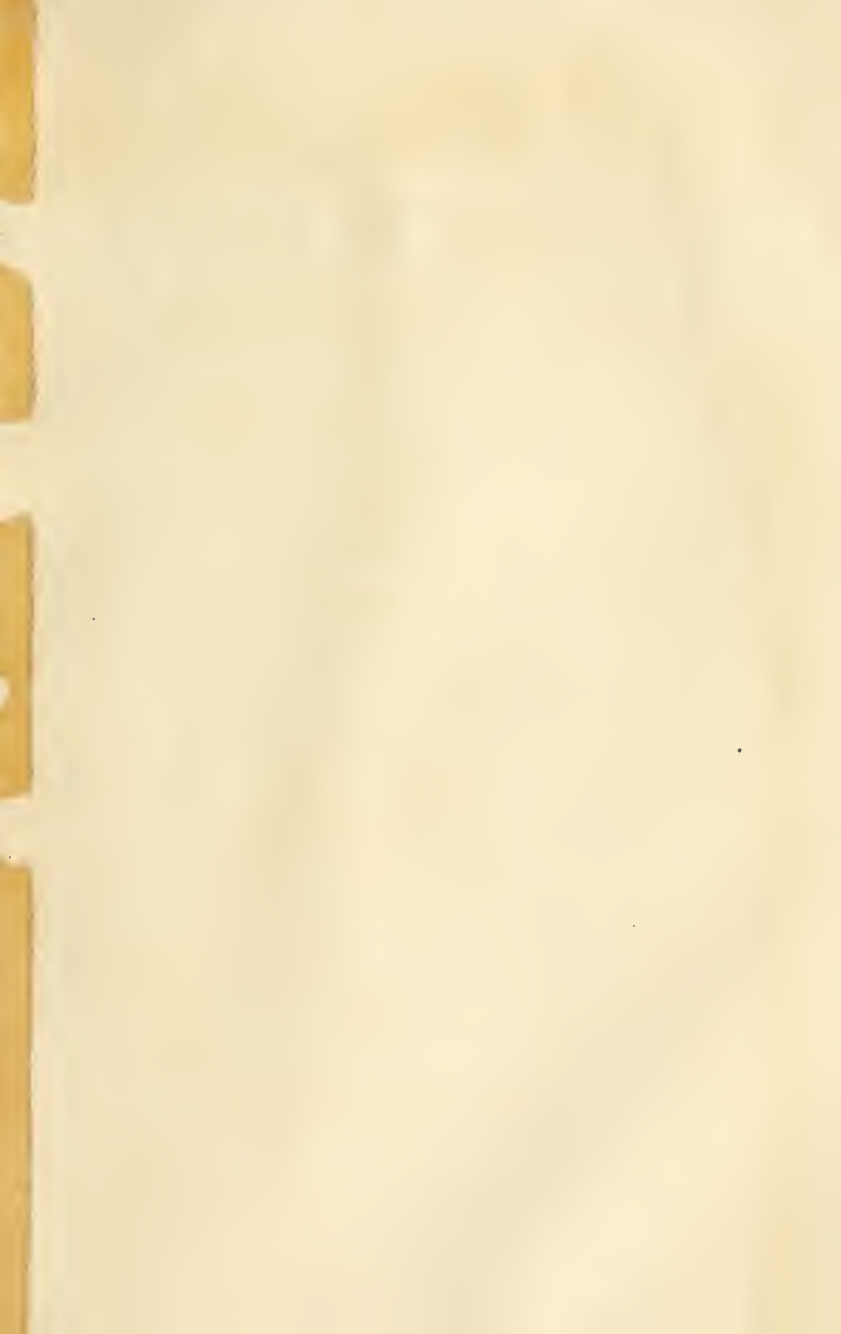
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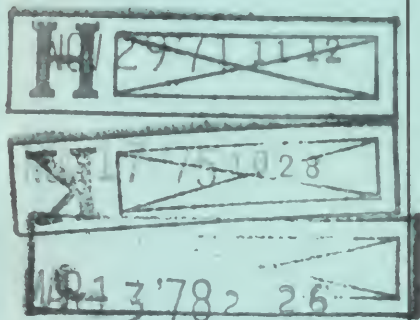
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